

ART AND AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACTS

Elizabeth Alexander: *'A most curious and ancient churchyard cross': scholarly definition and the Masham Column*

The ninth-century stone column at Masham has long captured the interests of scholars. Although severely weathered, it is one of the most significant pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon sculptures to have survived, preserving over one quarter of all the surviving Old Testament scenes, carved in stone, during the period.

This paper will explore the scholarship surrounding this impressive monument, beginning with the works of Antiquarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Gough, and Whitaker. It will demonstrate how these forerunners of Art History as a discipline, interacted with, and recorded, their observations regarding one specific early Medieval 'art' object, in order to trace the ways in which the 'authority' given to these early scholars influenced the next generations of writers. The effect of the authority thus invested will be examined by interrogating, first, the subsequent studies' concerns with the identification of 'style' or 'schools' of sculpture and their aim to create an overarching chronology for early Medieval art, begun by scholars such as Collingwood, before turning to consider the more iconographic readings of the column undertaken by scholars such as Lang, Bailey and Hawkes towards the end of the twentieth century.

Overall, this paper will show that, although the scholarship surrounding the Masham column has evolved significantly from its Antiquarian roots, it is nevertheless greatly indebted to, and ultimately still reliant on, the 'authority' of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commentators.

Karen Brett: *The house the Lord Built: reading royal authority in the Westminster Chapter House*

"The lord king built in that place an incomparable chapter house." With these words the thirteenth-century St Albans monk Matthew Paris summed up the newly rebuilt chapter house at Westminster Abbey. The extent to which the chapter house was intended by Henry III to be used as a royal building has been debated. It was, after all, primarily designed for the daily use of the Benedictine monks at Westminster. Yet the chapter house also had occasion to perform a secular function, most notably those times it housed the meetings of the Commons.

It is perhaps the chapter house's decorative tile pavement that provides the best evidence for Henry's influence. The pavement survives *in situ* today, partly hidden beneath protective layers of carpet and often overlooked by tourists. However when originally laid the pavement would have dazzled the viewer. Rather than leftovers laid by inexperienced tilers, as has been one recent explanation, the chapter house pavement delivers a surprisingly clear message of royal authority. The tiles themselves, in their imagery and size, appear to have been chosen with deliberation. The way in which the overall layout of the pavement was designed also seems to mark out how Henry III would have moved around and used his chapter house.

Lexy Denman: *The Wizard's Apprentice: Merlin, Vivien and the Pursuit of Knowledge*

Perhaps the ultimate Victorian *femme fatale*, Vivien (sometimes known as Nimue) enchanted many influential nineteenth-century artists and poets, including Edward Burne-Jones, Frederick Sandys, Alfred Tennyson, and Matthew Arnold. Merlin's wily apprentice has been branded a witch and a sorceress, a harlot and a temptress, but who was she really? This paper examines the writing and re-writing of Vivien's character and her relationship to her tutor during the nineteenth century, with particular attention to Robert Southey's translation of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and Burne-Jones' three representations of the enchantress undermining Merlin – *Merlin lured into the Pit by the Lady of the Lake* (part of a collaboration on an Arthurian mural in the Oxford Union Library, 1857), *Merlin and Nimue* (1861), and perhaps his best known treatment of the episode, *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1874). Expanding on the parallels already drawn between *The Beguiling of Merlin* and Burne-Jones' own turbulent relationship with María Zambaco, this paper explores the relationship between the two in terms of their roles as tutor and apprentice, and investigates interpretations of Vivien's pursuit of knowledge as a response to shifting attitudes towards women's education and a perceived threat to masculine authority.

Oliver Fearon: *Well-made and well-bred: authorship, authority and the construction of family history in the heraldic stained glass of the Knightleys of Fawsley, c.1530*

In this paper, I will examine the apparent social pretensions of two generations of an early Tudor family as was manifested in the stained glass they commissioned for their country house. The Knightleys of Fawsley were fresh faces in Northamptonshire when they moved to the area at the beginning of the fifteenth century but their associations with the Tudor government under Henry VII and then Henry VIII saw them climb the social ladder. This social distinction was also assisted by a number of advantageous marriages, which saw the assimilation of local families, through female lines, into the Knightleys family history. The stained glass commissioned for their manor house under both Richard (d.1537) and Edmund Knightley (d.1542) melded these new affiliations with their own Knightley family history.

This paper will explore how the engineering of their genealogical portfolio cemented their own authority as a Northamptonshire family. It will base this discussion on the complex (and expensive) techniques used in the making of the glass, which functioned to aesthetically proclaim their elite profile.

Louise Hampson: *Better than the real thing?: the role of antiquarians as the authors of a 'correct' past.*

When the York antiquarian Francis Drake wrote in his 1736 work, *Eboracum*, about the new black and white pavement Lord Burlington had just had installed in York Minster he described the Greek Key design as a "*mosaick work*". It was so utterly unlike the patchwork of ledger slabs, tomb slabs and monuments that had formed the nave and transept floors for the last five hundred years, but was deemed "properest for a *Gothick* building". In Drake's opinion, and by extension the cultivated opinion of the wealthy subscribers to his lavish *Eboracum* history volume, Burlington's work was a distinct improvement on what had gone before, replacing the hotch-potch accretions of history with a uniform, level floor of a single design in a style which was considered the most appropriate to the style and age of the building in which it sat. In replacing the original floor, so disrupted over time with graves, ledger slabs and repairs, it was surely better than the real thing. This paper explores the idea of antiquarian 'authority' for the 'improvement' of the built past and the early emergence in York of an appreciation for the medieval aesthetic.

Ellie Jackson: *'The pocket gospel books': assessing and defining a group*

This paper aims to challenge the authority of scholarly tradition, specifically regarding a group of well-known but rarely analysed manuscripts of the eighth to ninth centuries known as the 'pocket gospel books'. This category of gospel books was named in 1956 when Patrick McGurk brought them to general scholarly attention in his article 'The Irish Pocket Gospel Book'. The article became highly influential and the term has since been widely adopted for the designated manuscripts. Given its general acceptance, it is perhaps unsurprising that McGurk's category has rarely been critiqued; the label is repeated as a matter of fact without consideration of its meaning or accompanying implications. Yet there are notable problems with the category: the appropriateness of the name 'pocket gospel books', for example, is questionable, as is the extent to which they should be considered as being distinctively 'Irish'. It is also worth reviewing the extent to which they cohere as a group, or might be expanded to include other manuscripts. By addressing these issues, this paper seeks to build on the pioneering work of McGurk in order to reopen some of the questions posed by these fascinating manuscripts and reassess whether they should still be considered as an authoritative group.

Dorothy Nott: *Who has the authority? 'The Charge of the 21st Lancers at Ondurman' (1898)*

In concentrating on a single painting, *The Charge of the 21st Lancers at Ondurman* (1898) by Richard Caton Woodville, my paper will explore the nature of authority as exemplified in the two main characters in this confrontation, within the context of the British Empire in the late-nineteenth century. Initially the viewer's eye is drawn to the colourful representation of the Sudanese Commander-in-Chief with his very black skin, shiny and elaborate headgear and powerful stance. The only Sudanese shown mounted, he is clearly a man who is used to being in charge. Opposing this dramatic figure is a group of British soldiers dressed in drab khaki, and emerging from their lines, the colonel, calmly leading his men as he squares up for the contest. Here Woodville is depicting a battle not just between two armies, but between two civilisations, a battle where the values of Empire in the soldiers' understated confidence in the righteousness of the cause outweigh the more flamboyant presentation of what Kipling, in a reflection of contemporary thinking, has referred to as "lesser breeds".

Helen Shaw: *Material Agency: Lynda Benglis and polycentric ceramic networks*

Drawing on the current retrospective of Lynda Benglis at the Hepworth Gallery (Feb 6-Jul 1 2015), this paper considers the concept of 'material agency' in artists who have chosen to work with the ceramic medium at some point in their artistic career. Through Benglis' ceramic sculptures, I look back at artists working with ceramics during the 1950s and 60s in Europe and US. I suggest that during this period communication between artists and ceramicists created polycentric networks, and as such, produced not only varied conversations in clay, but also conversations between clay, fine art and sculpture internationally. This paper considers how Benglis' sculptures shed light on how such networks during the 50s and 60s gave ceramic art recognition as a fine art discipline. This was made possible through artists acknowledging, and playing upon, the authority of fine art and subverting ceramic art's 'peripheral' status. Benglis' ceramic sculptures operate in a similar way - the blurring of distinctions between pliable and rigid, accidental and intentional, form and shapelessness. Benglis' ceramic works expand the scope of her artistic methods and engage the viewer with notions of craft, functionality, and primeval history.

Nicola Sinclair: *'Whoever was responsible for that purchase ... the worst ever made': authority and the mid-nineteenth-century National Gallery*

This paper explores questions of authority in the National Gallery through the case study of a particularly contentious acquisition. In 1854 the Gallery displayed around 250 paintings, very few of which were pre-Seventeenth-Century, and only three were German. It is hardly surprising that the purchase that year of Herr Krüger's collection of 64 fifteenth-to-sixteenth-century German paintings sparked demands to know who had authorized the acquisition, and on what grounds.

The purchase had exposed two on-going problems of authority at the National Gallery; who should decide what belonged there, and what qualities could justify an individual painting's inclusion? The unusual way the collection was acquired illustrated shortcomings in the institution's leadership that were redressed in part through its reconstitution in 1855. Less tractable were the difficulties it raised in applying value to paintings according to novel religious, historical and aesthetic criteria. These value-frameworks had divergent and often conflicting importance in the hands of different personalities. By 1862 only four of the Krüger pictures remained on display in London. How had opinion differed so greatly on this collection? On whose, or by what authority were these early German paintings declared inferior to early Italian works? How authoritative do those decisions remain today?

Lyndsey Smith: *By whose authority? The collectors and curators of 'medieval' ivories in Britain (1845-1972)*

Early interest in, and scholarly response to, the arts of Anglo-Saxon England and its ivories was limited; however, there was an extraordinary explosion of interest in the medieval arts during the second half of the nineteenth century which coincided with, and was to a certain extent influenced by, the founding of the British Archaeological Association in 1843, the Act for Encouraging the Establishment of Museums in Large Towns in 1845 and the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in 1851. Broadly speaking, this period would set the stage for the acquisition by British and Irish museums of 95 of the 166 ivories catalogued by Beckwith as Anglo-Saxon in 1972. It is the period during which six of the key collectors, born in the early-nineteenth century, would leave their collective mark on the future practices of collection, display and publication of Anglo-Saxon art and ivories. Having said this, by looking into the history of the collection, publication and exhibition of early medieval ivories in Britain, this paper will examine three questions: by whose authority were those objects labelled?; why were they labelled in such a manner?; and in what contexts were those original labels changed between 1851 and 1972?

Heidi Stoner: *'Power with Pride': signifying authority in Anglo-Saxon England*

The seventh and eighth centuries cannot be discussed without the discussion of kingship and its imperial models. The period is often characterized by the formation of kingdoms and the transformation of the insular world from that of a 'pagan' or 'tribal' society into medieval Christian kingdoms. This paper will address the imperial models of kingship and how this has influenced what kingship may have looked like in a period before the traditional depictions of kings. While no portrait of a king exist from this time the material record is rich in objects that directly relate to kingship such as royal or princely burials, coins, and other extent archeologically finds. Many of these objects derive from Roman types, which are then changed and used to express an Anglo-Saxon idea of power and authority. These objects have the potential to be examined alongside historic and literary sources, in order to stitch together a more subtle picture of what kingship might have looked like and aspired to be in this period of change. The images and visual language of this period has long been acknowledge to borrow from the iconographies of the late antique and Roman world in order to signify power but perhaps in re-

examining the language and objects in tandem it will be possible to see where the continuous visual language has been articulated in new ways creating a visual culture unique to the insular world.

Leah Xiao: *Challenging an architectural authority: I.M. Pei's Museum for Chinese Art, Shanghai, 1946*

By examining the first museum project that I.M. Pei conceived as an anticipation of modern Chinese architecture in Shanghai, this paper probes how Pei challenged the architectural authority of the Nationalist Government and offered his own representation of Chineseness that encountered the language of Western modernism in the 1940s.

In February 1948 Pei's graduation design for Harvard GSD, under the supervision of Walter Gropius, was published in *Progressive Architecture*. Though unrealised, the work was highly praised as a monumental piece of modern museum design. However, neglected to date is the fact that Pei intended his museum for a very specific location, the unfinished urban plan of the Civic Centre in the Jiangwan District of Shanghai, a part of the Greater Shanghai Plan initiated by the Nationalist Government during 1929-37, a scheme that promoted an architectural statement of Chineseness among the wider context of constructing new Chinese architecture in the 1920s-30s. This paper will consider this Chinese context in detail to address how Pei questioned the architectural style in the Civic Centre and asserted his own architectural authority.