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## From minor to major: the minor arts in medieval art history

Review of:

*From Minor to Major: The Minor Arts in Medieval Art History*, edited by Colum Hourihane, Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2012, 336pp., 257 col. plates, 42 b. & w. illus., £00.00 [\$35.00] pbk ISBN 978-0-9837537-1-1

Elizabeth L'Estrange

This richly illustrated book brings together sixteen essays that explore a number of different types of medieval art objects that are usually given appellations such as 'minor', 'decorative', 'applied' and 'ornamental'. In his introduction, Colum Hourihane states that the changes in medieval art history over the last 20 years mean that a re-evaluation of the field is now timely. Despite this shifting landscape – a more 'holistic' approach to study and the softening of 'the hard edges of old-fashioned connoisseurship' – he notes that there has been 'no single study of the minor vis-à-vis the major arts' in the last thirty years.<sup>1</sup> The essays in the volume, he says, examine the minor versus major divide in different ways: many stress the lack of such division in the medieval period, others accept a division but emphasize 'the primary nature of their own material' and others explore how divides that have developed from the historiography are no longer applicable.<sup>2</sup> Many of the authors thus situate their subjects in relation to the hierarchy of the arts as first established by Vasari and highlight the problematic nature of their objects – size, anonymous author- or ownership, secularity, ephemerality – that complicates their status as 'art' in the received sense and which has relegated them to a 'minor' position. Several also note the role of the Gothic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement in making some of these objects areas of intense study in the nineteenth century, whilst recognising that this revival in itself often had a certain agenda. There are many calls in these papers for the objects under consideration to be reclassified as 'major'. This has already happened for manuscript illumination, as the authors Paul Binski and Thomas E. Dale both point out. Yet as Binski notes, the privileging of manuscript illumination as a 'major' art can also be misleading for the interpretation of the sources and evolution of other 'minor' arts.<sup>3</sup>

The variety of media and objects covered in this publication is wide. As Hourihane remarks, 'minor' is used to refer not just to individual media outside of architecture, sculpture and painting, but also to those areas of medieval studies that have been neglected'. Thus the secular arts (including jewellery and profane wall paintings), stained glass, misericords, byzantine art, tapestry, alabaster sculpture, seals and coins, are the subjects of essays that in some cases offer new interpretations of well-known material (such as Laura Weigert's analysis of the

<sup>1</sup> Hourihane, xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Hourihane, xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Binski, 19-20.

Lady and the Unicorn tapestries), and in others highlight the limitations imposed by historiography (especially the case for Byzantine objects considered by Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Alice Walker). Other essays highlight the ways in which unusual or neglected sources can be exploited to enrich our understanding of different aspects of medieval culture (such as the musical iconography on misericords).

Paul Binski's article 'London, Paris, Assisi, Rome around 1300: Questioning Art Hierarchies' takes examples of 'mixed media' works to explore notions not only of hierarchy but also of innovation. The issue of invention, he claims, 'leads us to treat great and small alike with scepticism, and to look harder instead at the middle, at the zone of cooperation between the arts'.<sup>4</sup> The first object of his discussion, the Westminster Retable, offers the chance to re-examine the links between French and English art in the early fourteenth century and in particular the relationship between panel painting and book illumination. Binski argues for a rethinking of the traditional hierarchy, established by Panofsky amongst others, in which book illumination ('more reliable because more complete') is given primacy over panel painting.<sup>5</sup> The Westminster Retable, Binski suggests, 'point[s] to the existence of lost court panel and wall paintings produced in the "inventive" mixed context of the public ensemble, not the more private sphere of book art'.<sup>6</sup> Turning to the example of wall paintings from Assisi, Rome and Paris, Binski sheds light on the heretofore 'utterly obscure' 'amalgam of styles' associated with the work of the Northern Master, who painted some oil-based wall paintings in the right transept of the Upper Church in Assisi. Noting that the source for the Northern Master's handling of the decoration is the stained glass in Strasbourg Cathedral, Binski suggests that it is to the 'larger *ordinatio* of architecture and stained glass around 1270' that we need to turn in order to understand the Assisi paintings.<sup>7</sup> Conjecturing on the way in which Italian art may have made its way to the French court, at a time when the papacy was French and Louis IX was being hailed a very 'Franciscan' saint, Binski once again suggests rethinking the primacy given to book illumination and in particular the importance of Jean Pucelle as the innovator of International Gothic.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas E. Dale's contribution, 'Transcending the Major/Minor Divide: Romanesque Mural Painting, Color, and Spiritual Seeing' begins by highlighting the ambiguous position of mural painting in art history: on the one hand it is 'usually understood as a "major" art by virtue of its scale' yet also 'assimilated to a minor art by the assumptions of much modern historiography and also by the technique of reproduction, which mediated often fragmentary or badly damaged programs of imagery'.<sup>9</sup> Dale's concern is to highlight the importance of murals and especially of their colour that contributed to a holistic experience of sacred space that also

<sup>4</sup> Binski, 6

<sup>5</sup> Binski, 14; in relation to this hierarchy he cites in particular Robert Branner, 'The Painted Medallions in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 58 (1968), 1-42; and Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origin and Character*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Binski, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Binski, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Binski, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Dale, 23.

included gem-encrusted liturgical vessels, illuminated manuscripts and polychromed sculpture. The author begins by tracing the ways in which historiography has transformed mural painting into a minor art beginning with the small-scale drawings and fragment-collecting of antiquarians in the seventeenth century. This was then followed by the 'formalist interpretations of Romanesque' in the early twentieth century and more recently, the search for iconographic sources.<sup>10</sup> These approaches led to Romanesque painting being 'valued for its two-dimensional, decorative quality' and its fragmentary display in museums. Like Binksi, Dale queries the actual role of manuscript illumination as sources for larger scale designs like murals, this time referring to the iconographical research of Emile Mâle.<sup>11</sup> A more holistic approach has been underway since the 1960s although Dale suggests that the place of colour and form 'remains largely unexplored'. He thus goes on to examine medieval theories of colour and vision which were 'understood [...] as vehicles for a higher level of seeing that translated the terrestrial sanctuary into a vision of the celestial one'.<sup>12</sup> Dale then discusses these theories in relation to several examples including paintings by the Circle of the Master of Pedret from Catalonia. At the end of the article, Dale refers to the way in which mural paintings contributed to 'fashioning the sacred space of meditation and imagining the faithful to be at one with God'. The notion of a 'kinetic dimension to the production of sacred space', which draws on diverse and fascinating literature listed in the footnotes, left the reader wanting more and would be worth exploring further.<sup>13</sup>

Sharon E. J. Gerstel's article 'Facing Architecture: Views on Ceramic Revetments and Paving Tiles in Byzantium, Anatolia, and the Medieval West' notes the lack of attention paid to architectural ceramics within discussions of medieval Byzantine luxury art. Gerstel traces an interest in architectural tiles to the Arts and Crafts Movement which was in itself inspired by the Gothic Revival Movement of the 1840s and the 'lure of the "Orient"' which was given its clearest expression in Owen Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856).<sup>14</sup> Gerstel explores how the Gothic Revival's interest in the decoration of English churches led to the excavation and replication of ceramics that were employed by architects and designers like A. W. N. Pugin and George Gilbert Scott. She then proceeds to examine how tiles were actually used within medieval Gothic churches and monasteries where, in the case of the latter, they may have been employed to delimit spaces and to create visual axes that played a role in the organisation and experience of liturgical activities. Gerstel then goes on to examine tiles in Seljuk and Ottoman Anatolia from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Westerners' experiences of Ottoman tiles in the nineteenth century – gained on the Grand Tour and depicted in Orientalist paintings led these ceramics, like their English Gothic counterparts, to be used as the inspiration for the decoration of late nineteenth-century houses like the Arab Hall in

<sup>10</sup> Dale, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Dale, 30; he also refers here to Ernst Kitzinger who has argued the contrary – 'The Role of Miniature Painting in Mural Decoration', in *The Place of Book Illuminations in Medieval Art*, ed. By K. Weitzmann, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 99-142.

<sup>12</sup> Dale, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Dale, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Gerstel, 44-45.

Leighton House.<sup>15</sup> Regarding Byzantine tiles, Gerstel states that the 'unfortunate [...] timing of their discovery [in 1893] [...] has, in part, led to their marginalization in modern scholarship on architectural ceramics'.<sup>16</sup> Gerstel then offers a detailed analysis of the manufacturing and use of Nikomedia tiles, which she suggests were used to create 'colorful and patterned interiors' to churches and may also have enhanced acoustic resonance. She goes on to argue that it is likely that tenth-century Byzantine tile decorations predated by centuries the tile programmes produced for Ottoman sultans, a finding with which art history presumably needs to catch up. In the final section of her article, Gerstel discusses 'tiles across borders' by examining the existence of Byzantine tiles in Islamic mosques, and Ottoman tiles in Orthodox churches. Such an examination transcends the borders established by earlier scholars and allows us 'to consider [the tiles'] common functional qualities and ornamental significance' and, as Gerstel concludes in her article, 'one of the least appreciated of media today may have been one of the most valued in the past'.<sup>17</sup>

Harald Wolter-Von dem Knesebeck's article is, by his own admission, 'a personal and subjective introduction' to the topic of 'Secular Arts: Their Order and Importance'. Using the examples of the Ebstorf World Map (c. 1300), the Naumberg West Choir, Henry the Lion's Braunschweig Lion Statue and Aquamanilia, and profane wall paintings, Knesebeck also seeks, like Gerstel, to think about how art objects 'cross borders', this time in terms of sacred and secular. The works he examines, he suggests, 'lie on the boundaries between secular and sacred' and he aims to show 'how the areas shunted off into the "minor arts" both contributed to and were influenced by essential developments in medieval art – developments that formerly would have been linked only to the "major arts"'.<sup>18</sup> The Ebstorf World Map is, as Knesebeck points out, 'a strange combination of a wall painting and book art, as well as devotional object and teaching aid': the circular representation of the world has, at its four points, the head, hands and feet of Christ emphasising that God is the way to Paradise, depicted close to Christ's face.<sup>19</sup> Knesebeck argues that '[c]ategorizing the map as either profane or sacred is [...] just as useless as its pejorative or enhancing categorization as it being one of the minor or major arts'.<sup>20</sup> Knesebeck's second example, the expressive founders' statues from Naumberg's West Choir might ordinarily be described as 'major' art. However, Knesebeck argues that it is not these sculptures that gave meaning to the overall programme in the choir, 'but rather the little-known paintings', the decoration of a lost deësis and the stained glass windows which told a Judgement narrative in which the statues had role to play as 'humanity needing redemption whose fate is at stake in the Judgement. Thus they link to the "real people" below in the choir'.<sup>21</sup> This 'performative' and 'human-centred' interpretation is one taken up later in Michael W. Cothren's essay on Gothic stained glass. Knesebeck then goes on to trace the

<sup>15</sup> Gerstel, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Gerstel, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Gerstel, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Knesebeck, 66-67.

<sup>19</sup> Knesebeck, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Knesebeck, 67-69.

<sup>21</sup> Knesebeck, 72.

links between a 'seminal work of high medieval sculpture – Henry the Lion's lion' and small aquamanilia based on the same model that were used for ceremonial handwashing at court and in church. Knesebeck argues that the lion aquamanilia always 'show a lion that does not act freely' and that the 'central act of the aquamanilia is a violent attack on a strong animal that causes it to spit water'.<sup>22</sup> The pourer thus masters the creature in the act of pouring although it is not entirely clear how the author then arrives at the conclusion that '[t]his understanding of the objects' use obviously eliminated the need to depict any holy persons in the iconographical repertoire of aquamanilia'.<sup>23</sup> However, he makes the salient point that aquamanilia have an important role to play in the history of table culture yet like many minor arts have been 'left out of the bigger picture'.<sup>24</sup> Knesebeck's final example is that of fragmentary wall paintings depicting the Iwein cycles in Rodenegg Castle. These paintings link the theme of hospitality or 'house-honor' in the text with that of the castle in which they are depicted. Through these examples Knesebeck aims to have 'assigned inherent values to some of the very diverse groups of medieval objects that are still classified and disrespected as "secular" or "minor"'.<sup>25</sup> The diversity of the examples he draws upon does indeed show the potential for future research although greater consideration of the methodological ways in which this might be done would have helped make more of the specific examples given.

As Kim Woods points out in her article 'The Fortunes of Art in Alabaster: A Historiographical Analysis', alabaster is a material frequently associated with English sculpture of the mid to late Middle Ages. Yet as Woods' discussion seeks to highlight, it was in fact a material used throughout Northern Europe and its inferior status and apparent rivalry with marble needs to be reassessed. After a brief bibliographical survey, Woods turns to the question of 'Alabaster – A Major or Minor Material?'. In this section she examines the assumption that marble is the material *par excellence* of classical and Renaissance art, demonstrating that alabaster was 'far from being superseded by imported Italian marble' but was in fact 'in great demand in the sixteenth century' for tombs, palace decoration and altarpieces.<sup>26</sup> Referring to the example of Claus Slauter's marble effigy of Philip the Bold, long-thought to be in alabaster, Woods argues that 'the boundaries [between the two materials] are in fact porous' and that 'there is no real hierarchy of materials here' with alabaster and marble being considered equivalents, 'despite the disparity in cost and despite very obvious differences in workability and vulnerability'.<sup>27</sup> She then considers the case of the tomb sculptures commissioned by Margaret of Austria at Brou where the use of marble for the upper effigies and alabaster for the lower effigies and the single effigy of Margaret of Bourbon would appear to privilege marble. However, documents reveal that there were practical reasons for this ordering of material: the alabaster, which is more easily damaged than marble, was

<sup>22</sup> Knesebeck, 75-76.

<sup>23</sup> Knesebeck, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Knesebeck, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Knesebeck, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Woods, 86.

<sup>27</sup> Woods, 87.

used for the lower effigies which were protected by the enclosed format of the tombs; in the case of Margaret of Bourbon's effigy, its placement in a niche already offered it protection.<sup>28</sup> Thus at Brou, it was 'alabaster, not marble, [that] was the visible signifier of status and dynasty'.<sup>29</sup> The following section 'Alabaster Sculpture – Major or Minor?' considers the way in which alabaster was used by English royalty around the time of Edward III. In particular Woods suggests that 'there seems a strong case for proposing alabaster as a kind of cultural signifier for Edward III and his close associates' since the material was used not only for tombs but also for altarpieces with royal patrons. Woods also shows that small-scale alabasters were not only diffused to a wider public – as has been widely acknowledged in the literature – but were also owned by the same members of the nobility who used the material for large-scale commissions. It was only with the rise of the 'cult of the antique' in the seventeenth century that alabaster becomes relegated to a minor status in relation to marble although Woods also considers – as do many of the other essays in the volume – the role of the Gothic Revival in rehabilitating the fortunes of such 'minor' arts. In the final section of her article Woods examines the fate of English alabasters whose presence in the canon has been affected by the fact that lower-, rather than higher-end, works have survived. The difficulty of dating alabaster carvings has also meant that English works 'have been subjected to a biological cycle of growth, flowering, and decay'.<sup>30</sup> Yet, as Woods' discussion demonstrates, it is difficult and seemingly unhelpful to try to classify medieval alabaster works as either major or minor since they in fact encompass several areas of interest to art historians – 'from small-scale devotional items to royal commissions, and [...] from rulers to parishioners' - which in itself 'makes them worthy of scholarly attention'.<sup>31</sup>

In her article 'The Art of Tapestry: Neither Minor nor Decorative', Laura Weigert discusses two tapestry sets, that of the *Lady and the Unicorn* and that of the *Story of Troy*. Weigert aims 'to explore the disjunction between the neglect of the medium in art history and its renown in the popular perception of the middle ages'.<sup>32</sup> The models of art history, she claims, are inadequate for fully understanding the function and reception of tapestries and thus she also seeks to propose 'an interpretative framework through which to evaluate and discuss tapestries in historically viable terms'.<sup>33</sup> Tapestries were a key part of the patronage – and expense – of the houses of France and Burgundy and formed impressive visual displays when hung at coronations, weddings and other politically important events. Yet the Vasarian tradition of art history with its focus on painting, sculpture and architecture, and the privileging of named artists, has led to the marginalisation of tapestries as a medium. This has been compounded, Weigert notes, by the fact that the subject matter of tapestries (mainly secular) and period of production (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), means that they do not sit easily in either the

<sup>28</sup> Woods refers to the contract for Margaret of Bourbon's effigy, see footnote 25.

<sup>29</sup> Woods, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Woods, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Woods, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Weigert, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Weigert, 103.

'medieval' or 'Renaissance' categories. In addition, she notes the erroneous 'assumption that women wove tapestries' which has also contributed to the medium's marginalisation.<sup>34</sup> Weigert suggests that art history's renewed interest in the work of Riegl, Semper and Warburg allows for a consideration of the ornamental and architectural nature of tapestries and she draws on these writers in the second half of her article to explore three of the features of tapestries: 'their portability, their spatiality and their materiality'.<sup>35</sup> This focus provides an alternative framework to one based on maker, patronage, and meaning. In the case of the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries, Weigert suggests how the set 'can be understood in relation to the contemporary tradition of love', in which the idea of the *locus amoenus* is created by the hanging of the tapestries in a room. Yet this illusion is also called into question by 'the tensions between surface pattern and spatial illusionism [which] denies the viewer the possibility of identifying with and inhabiting the world it represents'. Through her reinterpretation of the set, Weigert proposes 'a model of spectatorship that does not lead to the objectification of the female protagonist'.<sup>36</sup> This is an intriguing idea that chimes with much recent work on female agency and the rethinking of the gaze: further exploration of this here not only in terms of the tapestries' context and reception but also for the methodological aims of feminist art history, would have been welcome.<sup>37</sup> Turning to the Story of Troy, Weigert proposes that these 'can be understood as part of a contemporary tradition of battle performances' that go beyond the specific events they depict. As with the Unicorn tapestries, Weigert argues that the Troy tapestries both invite and resist the viewer's occupation of the space and events depicted. Uncertainty may also have been manifest in the specific display of the *Story of Troy* for a meeting between Louis XII and Philip the Fair, since '[w]hich of the warriors with whom the audience was meant to identify remained ambiguous'.<sup>38</sup> In this interpretative framework proposed by Weigert 'the image maintains its presence as fabricated object and resists being appropriated by the gaze of viewers' in a way that really gives us an alternative perspective that significantly moves beyond questions of 'major' and 'minor'.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> This is an assumption that has also permeated popular literature, with Tracy Chevalier's fictional *The Lady and the Unicorn*, New York: Dutton Books, 2004, telling the story of a blind female weaver.

<sup>35</sup> Weigert, 106-07; among the works by these authors that she refers to are: Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. E. Kain, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or Practical Aesthetics*, trans. H. F. Mallgrave and M. Robinson, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004; Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. D. Britt, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Weigert, 114

<sup>37</sup> See for instance Adrian Randolph, 'Gendering the Period Eye: *Deschi da Parto* and Renaissance Visual Culture', *Art History*, 27 (2004), 538-62; and Elizabeth L'Estrange, 'Gazing at Gawain: Reconsidering Tournaments, Courtly Love, and the Lady who Looks', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 42 (2009), 74-96.

<sup>38</sup> Weigert, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Weigert, 120.



Medieval seals, the subject of Brigitte Bedos-Rezak's article 'Outcast: Seals of the Medieval West and Their Epistemological Frameworks (Twelfth to Twenty-first Century)' are another object, like the ceramic tiles discussed by Gerstel and the coins discussed by Alan M. Stahl, which have escaped the attention of art historians. Furthermore, existing interpretations of seals from the sixteenth to the twentieth century have, according to Bedos-Rezak, 'obscured the original functional, medial, and reproductive dimensions of seals'.<sup>40</sup> The article first considers the role of sixteenth-century Antiquarians in the fate of seals: figures such as Francis Tate in England and Charles van Riedwijck in Brussels collected originals as well as copies of seals, made drawings of them, and exchanged items between themselves in the pursuit of genealogical history. This had the result not only of divorcing the seals from their original charters but also 'of conflating wax seals with other media and artefacts, of failing to distinguish between originals and copies' to the extent that 'the very stuff that made the seal an actual thing was rendered effectively invisible'.<sup>41</sup> In the seventeenth century, attempts 'to establish proof in the service of (political) truth' led to seals being used to verify and distinguish 'truthful' documents from false ones. The result of this was a 'totalizing taxonomy' which 'promoted an understanding of seals as separate objects, not unlike coins and medals'.<sup>42</sup> Bedos-Rezak notes that this "'numismiatization" of seals became an organizing principle of their study during the nineteenth century, and remains predominant to this day'.<sup>43</sup> They came to be studied as 'images' despite their original status within written documents and this was aided in particular by the making of casts which came to populate museum collections and which 'were valued like originals, highly regarded for their productive and didactic qualities'.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, seals 'entered the service of art history' yet in their study of casts, and their 'disregard for wax', scholars remained one step removed from seals' 'original cultural sphere of discourse and practice'.<sup>45</sup> Bedos-Rezak suggests that closer attention to seals as wax imprints offers a better understanding of their function as 'simultaneously effective signs of representation and eloquent tools of conceptualization'.<sup>46</sup>

Medieval jewellery is discussed by John Cherry 'primarily within an English historical perspective' in his article 'Medieval Jewelry: From Collections to Consumerism'.<sup>47</sup> Surveying the rise of the study of medieval jewellery, which has its origins in collections begun in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he notes that it was the figure of Dame Joan Evans in the early twentieth century who provided 'the link between collecting and analysis'.<sup>48</sup> Her emphasis on the apotropaic properties of jewellery has resonances in the work of Keith Thomas and

<sup>40</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 124.

<sup>41</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 131.

<sup>42</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 135.

<sup>45</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Bedos-Rezak, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Cherry, 142

<sup>48</sup> Cherry, 142

Eamon Duffy whose works both highlight the importance of charms and objects engraved with religious images within late medieval devotion.<sup>49</sup> Cherry highlights how small objects like rings, pendants, ampullae and pilgrim badges had combined uses, being used to fasten clothing, offer protection, and serve as adornment. He notes that '[l]iterary studies have exerted considerable influence on the conception of jewelry', referring to Michael Camille's 1998 discussion of Love's gifts in *The Medieval Art of Love*, although he does not expand on this point further.<sup>50</sup> Cherry also suggests that the discovery of important hoards in recent times 'constantly leads to changes and reassessment' of medieval jewellery. For instance, a series of hoards hidden by Jews around the time of the Black Death in 1348 'may show the nature of the jewelry owned and used in Jewish communities at that time'.<sup>51</sup> The essay concludes with reference to the sociological perspective that now dominates approaches to medieval jewellery, in which it is explored 'through the theory of design and even psychology'. He points up the need for 'more analysis [...] of the depiction of jewelry in religious paintings from the point of view of both the painter and the devotional audience' and concludes that medieval jewelry reflected 'the paradoxes of the late medieval world' with the objects being enjoyed 'at different levels and in different ways'.<sup>52</sup>

Cherry's focus on small objects and the questions they raise about function, aesthetics and design, also serves as a useful preliminary to some of the essays which follow from his and which deal with enamels, pilgrim badges, byzantine 'decorative' arts, and coins. Cynthia Hahn's long article 'Production, Prestige, and Patronage of Medieval Enamels' considers the 'exquisitely made and typically small' enamels produced in the high to late middle ages. Her essay seeks to answer two questions: why did enamels come to such prominence, especially for *ornamenta ecclesia*; and 'does [enamel's] very success as a medium [...] consign it to the category of minor arts as a mass-produced product?'.<sup>53</sup> Patrons, she argues, 'are a major component of the rise in the production of enamels' who became interested in the 'adoption of a recognizable luxury product' that was made with great skill – one that was recognised in the twelfth century by Theophilus in his artists' handbook.<sup>54</sup> Hahn engages in an interesting case study discussion of enamelled chasses made to house saints' relics where, in many cases, the decoration did not necessarily reflect content, suggesting that 'chasses were produced in advance of any particular patron's request' with imagery such as Christ in Majesty and the Three Magi serving a 'generic holy function'.<sup>55</sup> Yet she argues against the idea of these enamelled objects being 'mass-produced' and being evidence of a 'lack of artistic

<sup>49</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971); and Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

<sup>50</sup> Cherry, 148; Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, New York: Laurence King, 1998.

<sup>51</sup> Cherry, 149.

<sup>52</sup> Cherry, 151.

<sup>53</sup> Hahn, 152.

<sup>54</sup> Hahn, 155; Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, trans. J. G. Hawthorne and C. S. Smith, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963.

<sup>55</sup> Hahn, 162-63.

imagination' by highlighting the broader significances of these iconographic choices, which are 'never repeated exactly'. Bishops, she argues, are likely to have seen parallels between their churches and their functions within it and the generic iconography that stresses the giving of gifts and the celestial Jerusalem. The final section of Hahn's essay, which seems a little disjointed from the preceding discussion, moves away from enamels *per se* and deals with the notion of 'minor arts', in particular that of small objects and the problems these throws up. Small, she argues, 'is not necessarily minor and [...] such classification has little or no meaning for the Middle Ages'.<sup>56</sup> The objects require handling, and are made to be gazed upon, and in doing so 'one begins to feel ownership and to make connection with all the "owners" of the past'.<sup>57</sup>

The haptic value of objects noted by Hahn, as well as the limitations of terms like minor and decorative, are also dealt with in Alicia Walker's article 'The Art That Does Not Think: Byzantine 'Decorative Arts' – History and Limits of a Concept'. She considers how studies of Byzantine art have been moved on by 'embracing the very aspects of the decorative arts that previously led to their marginalization'.<sup>58</sup> She first traces the history and definition of the term 'decorative arts' in terms of hierarchies and, like Gerstel's essay, notes the importance of the Arts and Crafts movement and Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, for the way they introduced Byzantine forms into modern design. She then moves on to discuss the quotation in her title, 'the art which does not think', explaining that the decorative arts have been 'commonly understood to operate in the domain of sensual, affective experience that is exclusive of rational processes'.<sup>59</sup> The 'art which does not think' was used by Christopher Wood in an article 'in which he relates a Frankish brooch and the concept of *mache* ("making" or "fabrication") to Alois Riegl's treatment of late antique jewellery'.<sup>60</sup> In his *Stilfragen* of 1893, Riegl denied 'Byzantium [...] status as one of "the truly creative artistic styles" because of its purported lack of innovation or originality'.<sup>61</sup> In Riegl's thought, in the decorative objects' refusal to 'think', they 'stake an insistent claim to their own materiality and presence'.<sup>62</sup> This, in turn brings the haptic qualities of the object to the fore and can 'serve as the departure point for engagement'.<sup>63</sup> Yet for the earrings and fibula Hahn discusses in her article, the 'excessive privileging of the formal qualities of the made thing ultimately fails to satisfy [...] because it denies engagement with [...] its socio-historical value and functionality'.<sup>64</sup> In fact, she points out that much Byzantine decorative art works 'include narrative and symbolic iconography that equip them to "think" in the same terms as works of art, like painting and sculpture' even though their 'media and

<sup>56</sup> Hahn, 168.

<sup>57</sup> Hahn, 167,

<sup>58</sup> Walker, 169.

<sup>59</sup> Hahn, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Wood, 'Riegl's *mache*', *Res*, 46 (2004), 155-72; Alois Riegl, *Die spätromische Kunst-Industrie, nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*, 2 vols, Vienna, 1901; 1923.

<sup>61</sup> Walker, 174 and footnote. 32.

<sup>62</sup> Walker, 174.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, 174.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, 175.

formats tether them to the category of the decorative arts'.<sup>65</sup> In the third part of the essay she considers how Byzantine enamels and mosaics have been taken as surrogates for a lost tradition of Byzantine painting: they feature heavily, for instance, in André Grabar's 1953 *Byzantine Painting*. Here she brings us back to the notion of hierarchies in which 'painting is understood as the medium most qualified as "art" and the value of other media [...] comes from [...] the degree to which they are "like painting" and allow us to recover this superior medium'.<sup>66</sup> Walker then moves on to consider the ways in which scholars from the 1970s onwards have challenged the 'minor' status of medieval decorative arts and recuperated function and context. Some of this came as a result of the 'institutional critique of museums', which led to the highlighting of the context and function of Byzantine objects in homes, palaces, and churches.<sup>67</sup> New approaches to Byzantine art, she notes, draw on anthropology, archaeology, material culture and also performance and agency. Thus a necklace with cross pendant and amulet cases 'demands attention beyond a Rieglian [...] focus solely on materiality because of the cross'.<sup>68</sup> Walker suggests that an anthropological approach might see the necklace 'as a tool of devotion, an advertisement of religious affiliation, or a luxury item that projected the owner's status'; drawing on the idea of agency, it might also have a 'distinctly talismanic function'.<sup>69</sup> Overall, her essay emphasises that 'the very characteristics that previously closed the door to some objects' membership in the category of the fine arts have slowly opened different vantages on these works of art that reveal the practices, beliefs, and values of Byzantine society'.<sup>70</sup>

Jos Koldeweij's contribution is entitled 'Notes on the Historiography and Iconography of Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges'. His aim is to examine 'how cheap, mass-produced trinkets are related to, and how this material interacts with, expensive jewelry as well as the other arts'.<sup>71</sup> Koldeweij begins by considering the association of pilgrim badges with members of the nobility, such as Louis XI and Charles V, who were often depicted wearing them and who served as models for the lower classes who owned cheap versions of the badges. Although it might be assumed that the lower classes had a different visual culture to that of their noble counterparts, Koldeweij shows that this was not necessarily the case. For instance, the tale of the Châtelaine de Vergi and Phyllis and Aristotle, both of which originating in elite, courtly, culture, appear on cheap badges that would have been available to the lower classes. The final section of Koldeweij's article traces the historiography of pilgrim badges and details some of the finds of the twentieth century, with extensive footnote references, and points up some of the more recent projects including exhibitions and databases aimed at making collections of pilgrim

<sup>65</sup> Walker, 175.

<sup>66</sup> Walker, 176; André Grabar, *Byzantine Painting: Historical and Critical Study*, Geneva: Skira, 1953; repr. New York: Rizzoli, 1979.

<sup>67</sup> Walker, 178.

<sup>68</sup> Walker, 189.

<sup>69</sup> Walker, 189.

<sup>70</sup> Walker, 191-93.

<sup>71</sup> Koldeweij, 194.

badges readily available on the internet.<sup>72</sup> Although the author does not engage in analysing the badges as 'art' per se (with all the problems this throws up), he does express the hope that 'over time they will be considered a major art form' and there is certainly much material here for scholars and teachers of medieval art to follow up.<sup>73</sup>

Like pilgrim badges, medieval coins were also small metal objects bearing a repeated design or imprint and, like badges, 'coinage was a major part of the visual material world of the Middle Ages'. Both types of objects, however, have a problematic status as 'art' and Alan M. Stahl's article 'Image and Art on Medieval Coins' seeks to argue that in some cases 'a desire to present the viewer with images of beauty and variety [...] qualify [coins] as objects for art-historical consideration and study'.<sup>74</sup> The article first offers a potted history of the types of coins and their imagery issued from the Anglo-Saxon period to the thirteenth century. In discussing the coins produced in the later Middle Ages, Stahl notes how coins issued in Flanders evidence its marginal status between France and England: the counts of Flanders imitated their French neighbours in issuing their own version of the important French gold écu, and the 'mutually beneficial wool trade' between Flanders and England 'led to the introduction of a Flemish version of the [English] noble, [...] differing from the prototype only in inscription and heraldry'.<sup>75</sup> English coinage also responded to French designs in the context of the England's claim to French territory although coins minted under Edward, the Black Prince, who ruled Aquitaine as his father's vassal, are different from those produced in both France and England, 'and can be seen as a manifesto of the Prince's independence from both'.<sup>76</sup> Stahl argues that if art is defined as 'that part of an object which is not functional' then it is to be found on those coins whose monetary role was minimal. Yet, he says, if 'we define art by the efficacy of an image [...] medieval coinage can be seen as one of the dominant art media of the era'.<sup>77</sup>

David Areford's article 'Print Trouble: Notes on a Medium In Between' explores the 'media confusion' of early prints. He notes that they 'often get stuck between conceptions of the medieval and the early modern' and that contemporary reception and consumption of prints is often based on easily available reproductions rather than through engagement with the actual objects.<sup>78</sup> Areford looks first at the 'innate complexity and ambiguity characteristic of most fifteenth-century printmaking, specifically single-sheet relief prints of religious subjects'.<sup>79</sup> He explores the hybrid nature of prints and their tendency to imitate other media, such

<sup>72</sup> For instance, *Faith and Fortune: Ornament and Devotion in Medieval Flanders*, Bruges, Gruuthusemuseum, Arnhem, 2006; the Kunera database ([www.kunera.nl](http://www.kunera.nl)) at the Radboud University Nijmegen; and Medieval Badges Foundation ([www.medievalbadges.org](http://www.medievalbadges.org)) which has digitised part of the collection built up by H. J. E. Van Beuningen.

<sup>73</sup> Koldeweij, 216.

<sup>74</sup> Stahl, 217.

<sup>75</sup> Stahl, 223.

<sup>76</sup> Stahl, 223.

<sup>77</sup> Stahl, 227.

<sup>78</sup> Areford, 231.

<sup>79</sup> Areford, 231.

as fabric: examples of tinsel prints and flock prints demonstrate the many layers and complex processes involved in printmaking. A flock print of the Crucifixion with its raised deep red mock-velvet surface makes Christ's sacrifice 'a tactile experience, a perfect focus for the affective and sensual goals of late medieval piety, satisfying both ocular and haptic desires'.<sup>80</sup> Prints were also ambiguous because they could be adapted – 'edited and reconfigured' and used in different contexts, especially by being inserted into books to replace or complement illuminations and to help expand texts. This 'book context is now at the center of early print scholarship' and indicates that '[prints] were appreciated as more than just practical, cheap substitutes for illuminations'.<sup>81</sup> Areford explores several examples of prints that were cut out, pasted, reused, painted or inscribed to demonstrate this point.<sup>82</sup> Another context in which single leaf prints were found is that of boxes – *coffrets de messagers* – which were likely used to hold letters, books, and perhaps devotional objects. Pasted into the inside of the boxes' lids, the prints 'provided an instant focus of devotion [and] when closed, the contents potentially benefited from the apotropaic aura of the image'.<sup>83</sup> The second part of Areford's article considers how the instability of prints has led to their problematic place within the history of art, since they 'complicate ideas concerning originality, authorship, and style' by being 'mass-produced, often endlessly copied, and mainly anonymous'.<sup>84</sup> He thus goes on to discuss the way art historians have written about and also reproduced prints in catalogues and inventories. The catalogue of woodcuts produced by Leidinger in the early twentieth century for instance 'indicates an unarticulated theoretical and methodological tension in the early scholarship [...] one born primarily from the very different goals of connoisseurship versus codicology and palaeography'.<sup>85</sup> The interpretations of prints by William M. Ivins in the 1950s and Christopher Wood more recently are discussed and, despite their different conclusions, Areford notes that 'both scholars are too invested in seeing the medium of printmaking as a crucial and revolutionary technological phenomenon that must part ways with the past'.<sup>86</sup> Areford instead suggests that 'fifteenth-century prints are best explored as

<sup>80</sup> Areford, 234.

<sup>81</sup> Areford, 234. See the exhibition catalogue *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and Their Public*, Washington, National Gallery of Art, September 4–November 27, 2005, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, December 14, 2005–March 19, 2006, ed. by David S. Areford et al., Washington, D.C.: Washington National Gallery of Art, 2005.

<sup>82</sup> The themes of this essay and further examples are discussed in Areford's book, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Areford, 241.

<sup>84</sup> Areford, 245.

<sup>85</sup> Areford, 247; Georg Leidinger, *Einzel-Holzschritte des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts in der Kgl. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek München*, part 1 and part 2, volumes 10 and 21 respectively of *Einblattdrucke des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Paul Heinz, Strasbourg, 1907, 1910.

<sup>86</sup> Areford, 249. He discusses William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication*, Cambridge, Mass., 1953; 1969 and Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, Chicago, 2008.

they are: experimental, multimedia, and dirtied by the hands of viewers who activated the power and potential of each image for practical and religious goals'.<sup>87</sup>

Whereas many of the preceding essays have dealt with small objects for personal use and display, the following essay by Michael W. Cothren looks at art form on a much larger scale – Gothic stained glass. His essay 'Some Personal Reflections on American and Postmodern Historiographies of Gothic Stained Glass' notes that although stained glass has a presence in the mid-twentieth-century art history survey books that still dominate the market (like Janson's *History of Art*) '[I]f any attention is directed to the subject matter and meaning of stained-glass windows, aspects quite prominent in the discussion of Gothic portals and manuscripts'.<sup>88</sup> He notes that the brief attention paid to stained glass focuses on 'abstract symbolic meaning and multicolored atmospheric lighting' that reveals a 'limited, Modernist approach to understanding Gothic stained glass'.<sup>89</sup> By contrast, specialists of stained glass 'have progressed to a Postmodern, complex, and certainly more nuanced understanding of the significance as well as the meaning of these works'.<sup>90</sup> The 'Modernist approach' he identifies as coming from the study of stained glass – led by Louis Grodecki – that emerged after the Second World War, when specialists had access to glass that had been removed for protection. This approach centred on relating stained glass to textual sources and 'particular local and theological contexts' as well as examining its production in terms of style and trends.<sup>91</sup> Cothren identifies a shift in contemporary scholarship which now seeks to 'envision[...] these works within a less tidy and more human-centered context of production, and most especially reception', drawing out 'more than one context of meaning'.<sup>92</sup> Using the example of the Theophilus window from the Cathedral of Laon and the Virgin Chapel from Beauvais he explores how windows operated as 'visualised sermons' and also as a 'stage for the performance of the liturgy'.<sup>93</sup> Such new 'Postmodern' interpretations, Cothren argues, need to be brought into text books and classrooms so as to acknowledge the messages conveyed by Gothic stained glass 'to diverse audiences [...] in relation to their performative context'.<sup>94</sup>

The final two essays of the book consider the carved wooden choir stalls found mainly in Northern Europe. Welleda Muller's relatively brief 'The Art of the Misericord: Neglected and Important' offers a rather list-like overview of the historiography of these carved stalls as well as a survey of the surviving types and styles. There is some consideration of the profane iconography often found on choir stalls with the author suggesting that the scenes ridiculing the religious 'may have reflected antagonisms between various monastic orders' like the Benedictines and the mendicants.<sup>95</sup> It is curious that the author does not draw any parallels here with

<sup>87</sup> Areford, 254.

<sup>88</sup> Cothren, 255.

<sup>89</sup> Cothren, 256.

<sup>90</sup> Cothren, 256.

<sup>91</sup> Cothren, 259.

<sup>92</sup> Cothren, 260.

<sup>93</sup> Cothren, 262-67.

<sup>94</sup> Cothren, 270.

<sup>95</sup> Muller, 283.

scholarship on manuscript marginalia and the notion of topsy-turvy imagery, especially as she refers to Michael Camille's interpretation of misericord iconography and its placement beneath the monks' buttocks.<sup>96</sup> Muller does, however, suggest that the misericords' depiction of the body 'in all its states from work to recreation and including its bodily functions of defecating' relates to the very function they served, relieving the body during church services while the mind was focused on worship.

Frédéric Billiet's essay 'Choir-Stall Carvings: A Major Source for the Study of Medieval Musical Iconography' considers the importance of these integral parts of church furnishings for the musicologist which he then enumerates in five short sections.<sup>97</sup> He first highlights 'musical space', and notes that establishing a list of the names and instrumentalists carved on the backs of seats 'would [...] help to complete the biographies of singers or composers, and to trace their movement throughout Europe from one church to another'.<sup>98</sup> In conjunction with other archival material, choir-stalls can also help musicologists with the reconstruction of lost instruments and serve as a source of information for medieval performance. An example from Leon Cathedral, for instance, depicts monks gathered round a book in an improvised way of singing called *cantus super librum*. Different types of musical repertoire are also discernible on choir-stall carvings, signified by the way the instrument is being held or played. Finally, Billiet suggests that choir-stall carvings are also an important aid to iconographical analysis and he takes as an example the set carved for Cardinal Georges d'Amboise in Château-Gaillon. The group of performing musicians is less a concert of minstrels (which Billiet argues would be anachronistic) but rather 'an allegory of Musica as one of the arts of the Quadrivium', signalled by the man holding a pair of scales.<sup>99</sup> Overall, the essay points up many lines of interdisciplinary enquiry that could be pursued in order to reveal the value of choir stalls not only for musicology but also for medieval studies more generally.

In many ways, this volume is more than the sum of its parts. The individual essays will, of course, be of interest to scholars of particular objects and media. As a whole, however, it raises important questions about the value and categorization of 'art' that will be of general interest to those working on 'minor' arts as well as academics engaged in teaching: many undergraduates courses now introduce students to the 'history of art history' and problematize the privileging of 'fine arts'. This volume offers many examples that could be adapted for this purpose. There is not a sense here of simply wishing to insert these little-studied or marginalised objects to the canon – and the study may unconsciously owe much to the realisation of the difficulty of this, as exemplified by later critics of feminist art history in the 1970s and 1980s. Rather, the contributors emphasize something more than a 'major versus minor' binary, drawing out the more fluid, permeable, and unstable,

<sup>96</sup> Muller, 283; no reference is given to any text by Camille but the author may be referring to his *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

<sup>97</sup> Billiet, 283.

<sup>98</sup> Billiet, 288.

<sup>99</sup> Billiet, 293.



boundaries between genres and hierarchies. Furthermore, the attention the authors all pay to the role of historiography in the shaping of their material – even where this has been limiting – allows for a critical awareness that permeates their own suggestions for alternative approaches to a diverse range of medieval visual culture.

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