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   The Age of Dürer and Holbein: German Drawings, 1400-1550 by John Rowlands; Giulia Bartrum
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on paper dated 1388–1421, all of which came from the Polish monastery of Elblag. CCC MS 509 is the oldest known manuscript of Johannes Marienwerder’s Septilium, in Latin and German. (Portions of this work are edited in Analecta Bollandiana 2–4; see Verfasserlexikon 8:56–61.)

Many volumes are university books copied at Oxford (from 1301) and Cambridge (from 1337–45). A group were copied for Gonville and Caius College by Master Walter Crome between 1441 and 1446; he copied another in 1442 and presented it to the university library in 1444. Four volumes containing a decorated two-column copy of Nicholas of Lyra’s Postilliæ (item 9) were copied in 1435–37 by Stephen Dodesham for a priest who recorded in an indenture copied on the flyleaves that on his death they should go to St. Alban’s. Dodesham, a Franciscan scribe, also copied Middle English religious texts, as did Henry Mere, the Christ Church Canterbury scribe of 380 folios of Alexander of Hales (no. 340) and of manuscripts of Chaucer.

Of the well-chosen plates two show portions of St. John’s College 271, a mortuary roll dated before 1214 with 378 entries from English and Scots religious houses. This needs a full study: it is crucial for the origins of Gothic scripts in England. Eleven plates show datable music manuscripts, chiefly English, ranging from 1064 to 1523. There are illustrations of important autographs: Florus of Lyons (no. 84); Eadmer (nos. 154, 167, and perhaps 63, 323, and 332); William of Malmsbury (nos. 57 and 379); Nigel of Longchamp (no. 248); Matthew Paris (nos. 14 and 125); Reginald Pecock (no. 67); William of Worcester (no. 145); and Roger Ascham (no. 313). (Readers must distinguish the numbers assigned to the chronologically ordered plates from those of the alphabetically ordered entries.)

In English manuscripts paper and parchment are found together in Thomas of Hanney’s grammar of 1382–1401, in John Arderne’s medical treatises copied by a sick Premonstratensian in 1440, and in a St. Alban’s miscellany in Middle English of 1449–54, which includes works of Lydgate and Eleanor Hull’s translation of the penitential psalms. The first datable paper manuscript is a volume of Latin sermons dated 1409–18. By 1467–72 paper alone was used for John Stone’s Christ Church Canterbury Chronicle.

The recent account of English manuscripts of the Anticlaudianus by Margaret Gibson, Danuta Shanzer, and Nigel Palmer (Studi medievali, 3rd ser., 28 [1987], 905–1001) suggests that Pembroke College 119 is less datable than Robinson allows, for though the script is of c. 1200, the text is poor in quality and lacks the prologue. There is now an edition of Trinity R 15 21 (item 356) with fifteen plates in J. B. Friedman, John de Foxton’s Liber cosmographiae (Leiden, 1988); the passage illustrated here is instructive. Can item 142, a Welsh manuscript dated 1085–91, contain all of Augustine’s De Trinitate in 78 folios? Such questions are bound to arise. But these volumes, with their important and original discussion of why manuscripts were dated, will be prized even by readers interested in manuscripts outside Cambridge.

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This catalogue accompanied a magnificent exhibition of early German drawings held at the British Museum. The works were drawn largely from the museum’s own collection but also from other British public and private collections. It overlaps to some extent two earlier British Museum exhibition catalogues, also by John Rowlands:
The Graphic Work of Albrecht Dürer (1971) and German Drawings from a Private Collection (1984). But the 213 entries in this catalogue are much longer and better documented, and the reproductions are generally finer (40 are in color.)

By far the most interesting unpublished drawing to make its debut here is the Three Boys Playing, acquired by the British Museum from a private collection in 1987 (no. 130). Rowlands is certainly right to place the sheet, with its lumpish contours and blunt, white modeling strokes, among the early chiaroscuro drawings of Cranach. His inquiries into a pair of fifteenth-century unpublished drawings are less successful (nos. 18, 19). He associates the Sibyl and the Martyrdom of a Pilgrim Saint with Konrad Witz and with Caspar Isenmann of Colmar, respectively, purely on the basis of general resemblances to painted figures. Rowlands’s most startling attribution — and it is entirely persuasive — involves the chiaroscuro St. Barbara (no. 128). This is its first publication since Hanna Becker assigned it to Altdorfer in 1938; Franz Winzinger ignored it altogether. Rowlands recognizes Altdorfer’s control and confidence in the buckling grid of modeling strokes, the flailing blades of grass, the white coils of hair. He compares it with the St. Barbara in Budapest (Winzinger 62), but he might just as well have invoked the St. Genevieve in Berlin (Winzinger 16). Suddenly the reacclaimed London sheet looks like an independent confirmation of Hans Mielke’s sensational (and simultaneous) attribution of the manuscript illustrations of the Historia Friderici et Maximiliani to Altdorfer (in the catalogue Albrecht Altdorfer, Kupferstichkabinett Berlin, 1988).

This catalogue is replete with sound opinions. In his discussion of the well-known Mocking of Christ by the Master of the Worcester “Christ Carrying the Cross” (no. 4), for instance, Rowlands helpfully glosses Robert Suckale’s recent hypothesis that the artist was based in Regensburg as a book painter. He points out that the London sheet was drawn with a pen and not a brush, as Suckale asserts; and at the same time he proposes to identify the Master of St. Mark of the Ottheinrich Bible with the Worcester Master himself, not merely with a pupil. One is inclined to agree with Rowlands — against Gunter Schade, Dieter Koepplin, and many others — that the London Head of a Peasant (no. 139) is the more likely Cranach original than the Basel version. The Basel sheet has great power; perhaps Cranach worked it up himself. But the London version is more lucid and informative and therefore must be the study from life. In at least two cases Rowlands successfully invokes his predecessor Campbell Dodgson against orthodox opinion: the attributions of the Two Heads in red chalk (no. 112) to Baldung (instead of Schäufelein) and of the chiaroscuro Biblical Studies (no. 200) to Holbein are both persuasive.

In general Rowlands places great weight on the opinions of Dodgson, Karl Parker, and Edmund Schilling. This is not a bad policy: they were more intimate with the collection than most continental scholars. But sometimes it leads to trouble. The agile figures in the Scenes of Martyrdom from Schilling’s own collection (no. 7), for example, have little to do with Rueland Frueauf the Younger. Nor is there any good reason to overthrow Winzinger and embrace Dodgson’s (and Otto Benesch’s) old attribution of the flat and awkward Hermit Holding a Crucifix to Wolf Huber (no. 133).

Indeed, there is considerable haziness here around the edges of Huber’s oeuvre. Rowlands’s argument that the Head of a Man Wearing a Fur Hat (no. 134) is Huber’s own copy of the far superior Erlangen version looks like a case of wishful thinking. And the Nativity from the Schilling collection (no. 121) is surely much closer to Huber than Rowlands admits.

One of the most absorbing puzzles of the show is the Meeting of the Three Living and the Three Dead, evidently a design for a woodcut (no. 143). Rowlands rightly hesitates to accept Tilman Falk and Koepplin’s Cranach hypothesis. But no one seems to have
considered Baldung’s woodcut work around 1505, for example, the illustrations for Ulrich Pinder’s Der beschlossen gart. Better to stand by a loose association with a well-defined personality, however, than to flounder for a positive identification. The desire to affix a name to the hand can lead to imprudent attributions. Much too little is known about Thoman Burgkmair and Sigmund Holbein, for instance, to justify any attributions of pen drawings to their hands (nos. 159 and 166). Nor is there any good reason for discerning the ghostly Hans Dürer behind the HD monogram on numbers 102 and 103.

Albrecht Dürer is another matter. Here Rowlands makes substantial contributions to old debates. He confirms, for example, that the Christ as Teacher and the Young Woman Fanning a Fire (nos. 25–26) are indeed by Schongauer and not the young Dürer; and he corroborates the late dating of the landscape watercolors, that is, to the return journey from Italy in the spring of 1495 or even later. In two conspicuous cases Rowlands reverses the opinions he delivered in his own 1971 catalogue. One of the great Dürer riddles is the Old Woman in charcoal on red-tinted paper (no. 90). Unfortunately the grounds for an attribution to Baldung — a comparison with a group of designs for glass paintings — are quite uninspiring. Rowlands should not have abandoned the old Dürer attribution. The best reasons for it were provided by Karl Oettinger: the mood and the psychology say Dürer around 1506. The St. Martin Dividing His Cloak (no. 91a), by contrast, appeared in the 1971 catalogue as Baldung; now Rowlands moves it to “Dürer Workshop” and to the 1520s. But it is not at all clear why this sheet should be separated from the St. Augustine in Berlin and the Anna Selbdrit in Budapest, which are early works and may very well be Dürer’s own. In one of the most vexed of all Dürer questions, that of the “Benedict Master,” Rowlands holds fast. He again offers the Maurus Rescuing Placidus (no. 45) as Dürer, and this is hard to swallow. The discussion boils down to the problem of function. Dürer is supposed to have suppressed his hand in order to carry out the task; in imagining that Dürer was incapable of drawing flat and clumsy compositions, we underrate his willingness to submit to the peculiar exigencies of glass painting. Fair enough; but then why not accept also the St. Peter (no. 97) — a cartoon for a window — as Dürer rather than Kulmbach, as Karl-Adolf Knappe and more recently Barbara Butts have argued? Generosity toward the St. Benedict series entails rethinking the fringes of the canon all the way through, particularly when Dürer is working closely with other artists. One might well start with the St. Catherine and St. Barbara (no. 99), a charcoal study for the Tucker altarpiece which has always been given to Kulmbach.

Rowlands’s attention to function in the St. Benedict attribution is exemplary. On the other hand, it never becomes a stable principle of his connoisseurship. Generally Rowlands practices stylistic and comparative connoisseurship, and with great consistency and refinement. The problem, as always, is how to justify publicly a stylistic attribution: successful attributions are often arrived at instantaneously and inscrutably, prior to any systematic inquiry. Somehow one always hopes for more than a mere comparison, however just. Surely the best hope of persuading others of the correctness of an attribution lies in a subsequent piece of writing that somehow accounts for the original moment of insight. And since that insight always, in the final analysis, rests on the evaluation of visual properties of the work, the written account ought to go fairly deeply into questions of style. In the prose of some connoisseurs — Bernard Berenson and Max Friedländer, classically — this “vindication” of intuition takes on a power and momentum of its own and ends up explaining a great deal more about the work than who painted it and when.

The attribution and dating of works of art are still the indispensable auxiliary disciplines, the foundation of all narratives about and interpretations of art. And yet
it now appears that if connoisseurs are to continue to command the attention of art historians — and not merely curators and dealers and others who buy art — they will have to convince them that they really do see works of art differently, that their keen and often uncanny powers of judgment are grounded in some irreplaceable cognitive faculty. The best way to do this is to write explicitly, with confidence, and at some length about style.

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Because Thomas Malthus believed that human population tends to increase geometrically, thereby far outstripping the arithmetic increase of its food supply, he concluded that famine and pestilence were the inevitable result, nature’s way of controlling overpopulation. In the present book Josiah Cox Russell presents a different view, one based on more than sixty years of personal research, much of it demographic. As Russell puts his case in prefatory remarks, the evidence supporting a radically different interpretation is so persuasive that “one can hardly accept a theory of automatic response of population to conditions of health and subsistence. Malthus, it seems, was wrong.”

In essence, Russell is convinced that human beings have always had a significant capacity to control their numbers, a capacity they have typically used. Thus, to illustrate with reasonably familiar recent examples not cited in his book, nineteenth-century American Shakers insured the early demise of their communities simply by failing to attract an adequate supply of converts while at the same time actually living up to their vows of celibacy. Similarly, the rural inhabitants of contemporary Ireland have limited an increase in their numbers by adherence to a social code that allows males to marry only upon inheritance of enough land to support a family. The resulting marriage age is on average so high, in the low to middle thirties, that fewer years are left in which to produce the abundance of children that would normally follow in a country that long frowned on all modern forms of contraception.

As Russell points out, late-ancient and medieval peoples also had at their disposal a wide variety of techniques through which population levels could be increased, decreased, or simply maintained. Nevertheless, since the Malthusian model is concerned primarily with the threat of increase, Russell’s main emphasis falls on the methods of limiting numbers that were available to societies in which abortion and birth control, while known, were not widely practiced. It must be said, too, that the resulting list is suggestively impressive. Older marriages will produce fewer progeny, as the modern Irish recognize, and if increasing numbers of women become brides only of Christ, as appears to have happened from the twelfth century onwards, fewer will be left to have progeny at all. Further, if mothers nurse their young instead of putting them out to wet nurses, they will experience longer intervals between birth and the return of fertility, thereby markedly reducing the total number of children they could otherwise have. Lastly, although other possibilities could also be mentioned, infanticide, and especially female infanticide, will have a far more reliable impact on a society’s reproductive capacities than will, say, a dependence on brides of Christ.

The obvious questions here are two: whether medieval people actually employed these techniques and, if so, whether their impact can be shown to have eliminated the Malthusian consequences of overpopulation. Russell answers both questions in the affirmative. In particular, he argues that notoriously high medieval sex ratios do