

From its beginnings in the mid-twentieth century, medieval archaeology has developed as an international comparative discipline with its founders and followers developing extensive research networks far beyond their immediate national boundaries. Ayers acknowledges the importance of the colloquia series *Stadtarchäologie im Hanseraum* (Urban archaeology in the Hanseatic region) established by the north German city of Lübeck, which has brought together archaeologists from a dozen countries on a biennial basis over the past twenty-five years to review and publish the latest discoveries from towns and settlements around the North Sea and Baltic rim. We are in the author's debt that this extensive dataset of fieldwork and post-excavation analysis has now been brought to wider international attention.

In a nutshell, *The German Ocean* is a remarkable work of synthesis of the material evidence accumulated over the past forty years for the emergence of a consumerist mercantile culture in the ports and towns of the region, each exploitative of its hinterland ecologies. The book contains an extensive overview of the growth and reach of the Hanseatic commodity trade that stretched from the Gulf of Finland to the English Channel, with its distinctive ecosystem of commerce-serving urban infrastructure and housing, maritime transport, proto-industrial manufactures, architectural expression, religious devotion and commemoration, eating and drinking habits and domestic material culture. What was once the preserve of town archivists is now an interdisciplinary domain combining documentary history, buildings archaeology, iconographic studies, excavated artefacts and ecofacts and the environmental record. These trading communities were so connected through commerce, culture and kin that new ideologies, fashion trends and technologies were transmitted with speed over long distances. It is no coincidence that these increasingly mobile and diasporic merchants and artisans were responsible for the percolation into local popular culture of the revolutionary changes in design taste and in religious practice sparked by the Italian Renaissance and Lutheran Reformation respectively. Traversing many diverse specialist research areas, from the bulk trade in Rhenish stoneware jugs to fish bone distributions, the book clearly demonstrates the growing and decisive influence of archaeology on what were previously ring-fenced historical paradigms.

The value of a study such as this is the careful deployment of multiple datasets on diverse structures, materials and scientific analysis into a meta-narrative of continuity and change in long-distance commercial and cultural transfer over 500 years. The archaeological record of maritime trade in a diverse catalogue of commodities, from timber, bricks, textiles, pelts and fish to domestic tableware, ceramic stoves and altar pieces, reveals the agency of the merchant in medieval society. It also highlights the transmission in cultural practice, technological innovation and design. In this way, Rhenish stoneware, which has the widest archaeological distribution of any domestic commodity across the North Sea region, can be viewed as both an indicator of long-distance commercial activity and a *Kulturträger* or cultural identifier in the destination context, in this case through pan-regional conformity in drinking habits. Occasionally, as in the case of medieval Novgorod, the Hanseatic station on the edge of the Russian pine zone, the archaeological record can reveal conformity to long-distance influences, but also resistance to cultural transfer. Here the distribution of German stoneware is concentrated within the enclave of foreign traders and largely absent from the indigenous settlement. *The German Ocean* illustrates yet again why excavated objects can be read as primary historical documents.

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Decorated Revisited: English architectural style in context, 1250–1400. Edited by JOHN MUNNS. *Architectura Medii Aevi* Vol IX. 280mm. Pp x + 248 b&w ills. Brepols, Turnhout, 2017. ISBN 9782503554341. €91 (pbk).

These ten papers were given at a colloquium in 2014, which marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Jean Bony's *The English Decorated Style: Gothic architecture transformed* (1979). Moreover, twenty years had elapsed since the appearance of Nicola Coldstream's *The Decorated Style: architecture and ornament 1240–1360* (1999). The same year as the colloquium (2014) also saw the publication of Paul Binski's *Gothic Wonder: art, artifice and the Decorated style 1290–1350*. Articles by Coldstream and Binski, therefore, book-end pieces by younger scholars in which aspects of Bony's attractive and perceptive synthesis are scrutinised and revised in the light of new research.

Nicola Coldstream offers a lively historiographical account of the fortunes of Decorated style from its vulnerability to moral judgements in the nineteenth century, to the mid-twentieth when a preoccupation with the origins of the Perpendicular style inhibited a full and nuanced understanding of this many-stranded creative episode. The determinist search, it is argued, was strong on architectural analysis while weak on other media, especially the applied arts in which the intricate and the ornamental were areas of creative fertility around 1300. James Hillson looks at Bony's analysis of Decorated and of Early Gothic as active forces generated from centres that met with acceptance or resistance in regions. This taste for strategic movement, which Bony demonstrated with maps, is seen as a possible by-product of his war experience or – more convincingly – the result of his training as a geographer and perhaps the influence of Henri Focillon. Bony, like others, sought the springs of modernity in the patronage of the court, and Hillson notes that in recent studies characterising these centres as more eclectic, flexible and retrospective, the privileging of the court as a creative leader persists. Andrew Budge selects stylistic change in fourteenth-century collegiate foundations for the application of Innovation Diffusion Theory and Frequency Distribution Analysis, tools of the social scientist. The results derived from fifty-eight buildings confirm the findings of conventional art history. A much larger sample might produce more striking conclusions, but the difficulty of selecting truly significant stylistic features to enumerate imposes limitations on the usefulness of such surveys. Jeffrey Miller complements Hillson's chapter by looking at the nave of York Minster as 'a monumental challenge to the interlinked concepts of experiment and regionalism that have persisted in discourses about the architecture of the Decorated style'. Cosmopolitan and subtly innovative, commissioned by well-connected and independent-minded patrons, the nave owes little to the king's work at Westminster. Its scale and grandeur were hard to assimilate in local building projects. If York supplied them with novel detail, local masons were also open to ideas from Lincoln and the East Midlands. Jon Cannon celebrates the extraordinary inventiveness of the 'Bristol Master' and his ability to adopt particular modes of design in different contexts and for different clients at St Augustine's and St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol.

Unorthodox flexibility and a brilliant diversity of invention certainly distinguish English Decorated from some Continental Late Gothic buildings, but Bony's claim that England around 1300 assumed the influential lead in the

development of Late Gothic has been looking more doubtful for some time. Jana Gajdošová's essay here on the evolution of curvilinear tracery by Peter Parler at Prague cathedral goes some way to undermine it. Citing very early examples of ogee forms noted by Paul Crossley at Salem and at Basel as well as windows at Constance, she shows that the Prague window patterns were probably assembled without English ingredients. Sophie Dentzler-Niklasson illuminates a vital part of the medieval mason's creative stimulus by focusing on the problems posed when new vaulting had to contend with the unusual plans of older buildings. At Pershore Abbey she rightly points out that attempting in c 1300 to put a tierceron vault over an early thirteenth-century polygonal eastern apse may have prompted a spontaneous innovation of lierne ribs in the adjacent rectangular bays. A similar creative adaptation, she suggests, led to the introduction of two-bay diagonal ribs, forming a lierne pattern over the uneven bays of the Romanesque nave of Saint-Jouin-de-Marne as early as c 1220–30. In the light of this, Jakub Adamski's study of the similarities between English tierceron vaulting and buildings in the Southern Baltic and Poland might prompt questions about which patterns could be English-inspired and which might arise from local problem-solving. Michalis Olympios puts forward evidence to support Bony's claim that cloisters of Bellapais Abbey, in Cyprus, register the influence of English Decorated.

Paul Binski closes the volume by analysing Bony's contribution as a remarkably perceptive and articulate historian of form whose interest in the culture that produced it – and in human agency generally – was somewhat limited. Original meaning, linguistic inflection in design, the significance of contrasts in relative scale and the dynamic between simplicity and complexity (including its economic implications) are subjects where he identifies scope for progress in understanding the remarkable artistic movement that we call Decorated.

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