



Anne-Maria J. van Egmond and Claudine A. Chavannes-Mazel (eds.), ***Medieval Art in the Northern Netherlands before Van Eyck. New Facts and Features*** (Kunsthistorische monografieën 23; Utrecht: Clavis, 2014, 224 pp., ISBN 978 90 75616 00 2).

Medieval Art in the Northern Netherlands before Van Eyck, New Facts and Features has its genesis in the conference ‘75 Years after Hoogewerff: an Inventory of Research on Medieval Art in the Northern Netherlands until 1420’ held in Amsterdam in 2012. The ‘primary aim (of the conference, J.R.D.) was to establish what changes have occurred in the last 75 years with regards to methodology, techniques and significant new areas of historical enquiry’ (7). The conference ‘attempted to summarize the scientific progress made in the last decades’ since the publication of *De Noord-Nederlandsche Schilderkunst* and ‘point out some of the gaps left in Hoogewerff’s account’ (12). As a result, the volume carefully balances historiographic analysis of Hoogewerff’s contributions with changes that have occurred over the last three-quarters of a century. It also provides case studies inspired by the subjects covered in his *magnum opus*.

The volume is divided into three sections: Wall and Panel Painting, Manuscript Painting, and Tomb and Architectural Sculpture. These divisions reflect Hoogewerff’s interests but with modifications. ‘Part one and part two move the story further from where Hoogewerff left it. Part three pays attention to an aspect of church decoration that was hardly discussed at all by Hoogewerff’ (19). The inclusion of formerly ignored subjects follows recent scholarship such as Carina Fryklund’s *Late Gothic Wall Painting in the Southern Netherlands* (Turnhout 2011), which is dedicated to examining understudied monuments. In keeping with the brief to explore the scientific progress of the last 75 years, many of the authors in the volume rely on Infrared Reflectography and X-radiography. Starting with Asperen de Boer in the late 1960’s and continuing to today with work by scholars like Maryan Ainsworth, Molly Fairies, and Arie Wallert, these techniques have been a staple in the study of northern art. In addition to the use of technical modalities not available to Hoogewerff, the volume’s authors also seek to update our understanding of medieval North Netherlandish art by downplaying Hoogewerff’s form of iconology – i.e. principally being concerned with religious messaging – and addressing function over meaning (19).

On the whole, the volume is successful at shifting focus to function over iconology with the exception of the trio of chapters dedicated to manuscript painting (88-115).

These contributions, understandably, are concerned with codicology and stylistic analysis rather than function *per se*. The technical data described in these chapters is useful but does not constitute a methodological shift that differentiates these studies from well-established forms of manuscript analysis.

The other contributions are more successful in meeting the editors' stated objectives. Three in particular are worthy of mention. The first is Anne-Maria van Egmond's article 'Art and Archives, Clerics and Counts: New Insights on the Crucifixion Mural in the Utrecht Burial Chapel of Guy of Avesnes' (58-73). The second is Wim van Anrooij's chapter 'Armorial, Heralds and Heraldry around 1400' (116-129) and the third is Jitske Jasperse's contribution 'Duke Charles of Guelders and the "Restoration" of the Tomb Monuments of Gerard IV and Margaret in the Roermond Minster' (172-187). It is telling that two of the most intriguing chapters in the volume concern subjects that Hoogewerff either ignored or left understudied – armorials and tomb sculpture. It is also interesting that all three offer social and political readings, which clearly demonstrate how addressing function can expand our understanding of a work's meaning.

Van Egmond's article uses archival scholarship and technical analysis to take a fresh look at one of the few examples of wall painting that Hoogewerff discussed. In particular, the author seeks to reevaluate the reason behind the extensive repainting of the crucifixion mural at the tomb of Guy of Avesnes almost a century after Guy's death. Van Egmond convincingly ties the repainting to Guy's relative William VI, Count of Holland, Zealand and Hainaut of the Bavarian house. Archival records show that William appropriated new revenues to fund the upkeep of the monument around 1409 (70). The author further argues that the repainting may have been in response to the political realities facing William at the time. Such a reading shifts our analysis of the mural away from a purely religious understanding of the subject matter and incorporates political realities into sacred imagery.

A similar thread runs through both Van Anrooij's and Jasperse's chapters. Van Anrooij discusses heraldry, which is a genre of artistic production that Hoogewerff never considered. The study shows how overlooked artistic forms can be valuable for bringing products of high culture into sharper focus. Armorials in particular provide a great deal of information useful to scholars studying the courts of European nobles. The author notes that it, 'is remarkable that a ubiquitous medieval phenomenon that communicates information about the origins of princes and noble families, the social order, status, the representation of power and identity, property, law, etc., should receive so little attention' (128). Making use of the 'New Philology', Van Anrooij discusses how heraldry can help scholars clarify not only for whom objects like books were made but also to 'differentiate different phases in the development of a manuscript and to connect those to the historical context in which the book was created, functioned, or was intended to function' (124). In other words, by attending to genres that art history has ignored over the last 75 years, scholars can assemble a fuller, more nuanced picture of various classes of artifacts beyond those ensconced in the canon.

Jietske Jasperse's article nicely bookends both Van Egmond's and Van Anrooij's chapters by focusing on the political and personal dimensions of the tomb monuments of Gerard IV and his wife Margaret in the Roermond Minster. She begins by establishing that the *gisants* atop the tomb are sixteenth-century replacements and that they conform to styles popular in the court of Charles Duke of Guelders around 1500 (176, 177). Further, the heraldry included on the monument matches that of the dukes of Guelders, also c. 1500 (180-181). From this, Jasperse concludes that Charles was responsible for altering the tomb at a time when he was fighting for his political legitimacy. She notes that Charles was not alone in such undertakings. The Burgundian dukes, in whose court Charles was held captive for a while, made similar alterations to familial plots to bolster their public reputations (186). She states that, 'these nobles [associated with the Burgundian Court] were fully aware of the strategic value associated with commissioning of works of art. This was the cultural and political climate in which Charles of Guelders was raised in his teens and twenties between 1471 and 1487' (186). Jasperse argues that the early sixteenth-century 'restoration' of the tomb is not an instance of poor conservation but was a calculated move made for political advantage. Rather than discount any possibility of interpreting the monument because of the alterations wrought upon it, Jasperse peels back the layers to show how attending to the entire life of an object can be beneficial to scholars.

In addition to the case studies, the volume also offers a substantial historiographic contribution to the field. Kees van der Ploeg's chapter 'The Reception of Hoogewerff's *De Noord-Nederlandsche Schilderkunst*' (24-39), for example, provides a critical overview of its influence on art history and demonstrates how it still sets the tone for many discussions today. Elizabeth den Hartog's chapter, 'The Study of Architectural Sculpture up to 1420 from G.J. Hoogewerff's Time to the Present' (148-159) supplements Van der Ploeg's study by examining Hoogewerff's scholarly biases against sculpture and architecture and placing them in their proper historical and intellectual contexts. She quite astutely notes that these biases not only shaped the scholarly discourse in the 1940's, they also continue to assert a great deal of influence over what modern scholarship considers worthy of study. The fact that Bouvy's 1947 book on medieval sculpture in the Northern Netherlands is the only source on the subject, for example, speaks volumes about the outsized impact previous approaches can have (150). Claudine Chavannes-Mazel's epilogue (188-195) extends both Van der Ploeg's and Hartog's observations and offers critiques of contemporary art historical practice by attending to lessons learned over the last seventy-five years. She ends her commentary by wisely cautioning against an over reliance on technical analysis. 'Technical research is in constant demand, and rightly so, as it provides information regarding the genesis of painting and the working methods of its makers. One principal question remains, however: do these methods indeed provide us with objective results? When doctors in the medical world argue daily over the interpretation of their patients' X-ray scans, can we then be sure of ours?' (195).

The volume is a welcome addition to the subject of medieval North Netherlandish art. The updated technical analysis (with all due caveats), as well as the publication of previously obscure monuments, fulfills the editors' aims to demonstrate the technical changes that have occurred since the publication of *De Noord-Nederlandsche Schilderkunst* and address some of the gaps left in Hoogewerff's original scholarship. It sets the stage for others to follow suit and reexamine monuments and subjects that have often lain dormant for three quarters of a century.

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