



Issue No.7 Summer 2015

Research Journal

Edited by Angela McShane

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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON



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Editorial

Angela McShane, Victoria and Albert Museum

Welcome to this year's edition of the V&A Online Journal. Our seventh issue features writing from current Museum staff, external scholars and practitioners, and graduates of the V&A/RCA MA in the History of Design.

This issue presents a series of exemplary object studies, which move from the micro to the macro through a



Clio (from the series: The Nine Muses), Hendrick Goltzius, 1592, engraving on paper. Museum no. M.88.91.271d. © Los Angeles County Museum of Art

variety of material translations and transformations. With ease, our authors embrace the full spectrum of the Museum's Collections, draw on materials from the 3rd century to the present day, and span the distances between the Silk Road and the V&A's own environs in South Kensington.

We start with Roisin Inglesby's investigation into the mysterious story of an 'orphan' object. This unique 17th-century embroidery depicting Mary Magdalene was left in the V&A's Textile Conservation Studio, only to be rediscovered in 2006 during a routine audit. Inglesby uses the artefact, about which little is known beyond what the object itself reveals, to produce a deft examination of the subtly coded material culture of domestic devotion in 17th-century England.

Like Inglesby, Nick Humphrey considers the transmission of design ideas from print to other media. In his essay, a 16th-century games box is shown to playfully mimic the appearance of the printed page, enacting a translation from paper to the more enduring surfaces afforded by wood, ivory and bone. Humphrey explains how and why this imitation was entirely deliberate, as he traces the multiple printed sources for the object's complex decorative scheme to give a clearer sense of the box's design, manufacture and social uses.

Material translations are also at the heart of Danielle Thom's study of an 18th-century ceramic quart mug. Here, multiple shifts – from print to ceramic, from flat to three dimensions – inflect the meaning of the polemical scene depicted on the object. By teasing out these modifications, Thom restores to view the mug's distinctive ritual, political and performative functions within Protestant masculine sociability in 18th-century Britain.

Swati Venkatraman Iyer's essay considers a wooden weft-beater unearthed by the explorer and archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein during his second expedition to Central Asia in 1906. Through Venkatraman Iyer's close scrutiny, this seemingly unremarkable implement illuminates the world of ancient Cadhota, recovering otherwise lost social, cultural and economic histories. Now part of the Stein Loan Collection, held jointly between the V&A and the British Museum, the weft-beater also provides insights into the Museum's early collecting practices.

Melissa Hamnett addresses another aspect of the V&A's early 20th-century history: the development of the Museum's new façade on Cromwell Road, designed by the architect Sir Aston Webb and

completed in 1909. Hamnett sets the scene in this first of three essays about the Aston Webb extension, establishing the project's wider social, cultural and political currents. In doing so, she shows the shifting alliance between architecture and sculpture that informed the façade's development, most notably by looking at the emergence of the New Sculpture. Parts two and three will appear in future editions of the V&A Online Journal.

The issue finishes with a contemporary building site, as Lina Hakim and artist Liam O'Connor reflect on the material transformations the V&A is currently undergoing. As the first Exhibition Road Drawing Resident, O'Connor spent a year documenting the construction of the V&A's major new temporary exhibition space, due to open in 2017. His practice, both at the V&A and during a previous residency at the British Museum, uncovers the many tiny gestures involved in projects on this scale: performances and material traces that remain crucially hidden in the finished buildings.

As Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the V&A, Hakim's presence points towards another exciting development in the 21st-century Museum: the

V&A Research Institute (VARI) Pilot Project. Generously funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, VARI has invigorated how we think about the Museum's Collections during a yearlong programme of workshops, experiments and conversations. In proposing innovative models for object-focused collaborative research, VARI is absolutely at the interface of history, theory and practice.

The V&A Online Journal aims to provide a forum for research papers from scholars inside and outside the Museum, in a bid to promote dialogue and open up new ways of interrogating material culture, current design practice, histories of design and all other related fields. Provided that submissions meet the academic standards set by our Editorial team and peer reviewers, we welcome articles for future issues on the history of art, architecture and design relating to the V&A's collections, public programme or institutional history; features focusing on new acquisitions or objects linked to V&A exhibitions; reflections on the educational or creative industries role of the Museum and reviews and previews of V&A publications, conferences or displays.

Further details on submission are available on the Submission Guidelines page and we can be also contacted at vandajournal@vam.ac.uk.

We would very much like to thank our authors and all who contributed to the successful production of this issue.

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An Unusual Embroidery of Mary Magdalene

Roisin Inglesby, Curator of Architectural
Drawings, Historic Royal Palaces

Abstract

The recent discovery of an anonymous 17th-century embroidered picture of Mary Magdalene raises questions about the use of domestic embroidery in the early modern home.

Iconographically unique, the embroidery does not fit within established historiographical understandings of the nature and uses of women's needlework. By focusing on the visual qualities of the 'embroidery-as-object' rather than the rhetoric surrounding 'embroidery-as-activity', this article addresses the possibility that this piece could have functioned as a devotional rather than simply decorative object.

scraps picked up without any plan during her travels'.² However, as suggested by her 1916 memoir, *My Table-cloths; A Few Reminiscences*, Mrs Tweedie was also a keen embroiderer with a consistent interest in textiles.³ Among the textiles that Mrs Tweedie bequeathed to the Museum were three 18th-century English silks, some pieces of lace and a 'Stuart needlework picture', which was displayed on the wall in her drawing room. The file offers no further information about the original provenance of the embroidery except that it had contained a note on the reverse, presumably an imaginative leap by Mrs

Tweedie, stating that the picture may have been created by a nun.



Figure 2 – The Nativity, embroidered picture, unknown maker, England, about 1650-60, silk thread on canvas. Museum no. T.33-2002. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In many respects, this 'Stuart needlework picture' bears the typical hallmarks of 17th-century English domestic embroidery.⁴ Embroidered in simple tent stitch, its size, colours, silk thread, technique and many iconographical details, such as the attention to the natural world, are characteristic of countless embroidered pictures created during the middle of the 17th century, when women and girls were actively encouraged to devote themselves to needlework as a means of personal and domestic

improvement. The composition is undoubtedly English; the absence of perspective, its hilly landscape, stylised building in the background and method of representing birds as small black crosses can all be found in other English embroideries from this period, and distinguish this object from needlework of so-called Franco-Scottish origin.⁵ Another embroidery in the V&A's collection depicting scenes from the Birth of Christ shows marked parallels (fig. 2), while a further example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, includes comparable representations of

buildings, birds and insect life (fig. 3).



Figure 3 – Susanna and the Elders, embroidered picture, unknown maker, England, mid-17th century, silk and metal thread on canvas. Museum no. 64.101.1300. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Encouraged by contemporary didactic literature such as Richard Braithwait's *The English Gentlewoman* (1641), Stuart women actively participated in a Protestant culture that celebrated the female role of virtuous homemaker. An important characteristic of women's domestic piety was their contribution to the 'household store' - the material culture of the home - through needlework. According to Ruth Geuter, 'the identification of needlework, particularly embroidery, as creative, virtuous,

morally beneficial, and indicative of female achievement appears to have reached a zenith in print in the years before the English Civil Wars, a time when the fashion for making domestic pictorial embroideries was developing'.⁶

Since needlework was supposed to provide women with a means of pious instruction and a model of exemplary conduct, embroiderers often depicted biblical scenes of virtuous or heroic women. Befitting an art form that was publicly deemed a standard marker of idealised, and thus homogenous, femininity, the range of acceptable and prescribed themes was narrow. We know of approximately 1,000 surviving pictorial embroideries (although many more exist in private collections) and of the 959 identified subjects or stories catalogued by Geuter, 43% depict biblical scenes.⁷ The most popular designs feature

the stories of Esther, Susanna, Judith and Jael, while other Old Testament narratives, such as the story of David and Bathsheba, are also well represented. Comparison of these extant examples reveals marked visual similarities, both within the central subjects, which often borrow 'iconic poses' from illustrated literature,⁸ and also in ubiquitous incidental details such as plants, flowers and animals.⁹

The process by which women were taught and encountered designs, often mass-produced from prints and pattern books, compounded the relatively small canon of approved images.¹⁰ Compositions were also created by professional pattern drawers, who supplied canvases with an outline image for the embroider to complete at home. This is not to imply that women exercised no control over their choice of design, as patterns could also be commissioned or invented by the embroiderer. Indeed contemporary sources proudly attest to individuals inventing their own designs. The Elizabethan diarist, Grace Sherrington (1552–

1620), later Lady Mildmay, recorded in her journal, ‘every day I spent some tyme in works of myne own invention, without sample or pattern before me and to draw flowers and fruit to their lyfe with my plummet upon paper’.¹¹ Nonetheless, comparison of dozens of embroideries supports Mary Brooks’s assertion that ‘seventeenth-century taste appears to have valued ingenuity in the creation of embroidered images more than originality in their selection’.¹² As such, dating embroidery precisely can be difficult, since throughout the 17th century the most popular copied patterns were consistently reproduced.¹³

While adhering to many of the formal conventions that we expect from 17th-century English domestic needlework, the V&A Magdalene appears to be completely unique. Its composition, iconography and subject matter are unlike any other known piece of early modern embroidery.¹⁴ This image of the Magdalene – and with her long hair, naked breasts, jar of ointment and holy book it is unmistakably she – stands alone amongst the hundreds of surviving images that women embroidered to demonstrate their skill and beautify their homes. As discussed below, Mary Magdalene retained her place as an important female saint and exemplary figure long after the Reformation, but she is simply not part of the usual repertoire of embroidered images.

Both contemporary treatises and modern interpretations equate the repetition of standard religious themes with women’s conformity to societal expectations. As Lena Cowen Orlin writes, ‘In surviving pieces of work the themes are sufficiently redundant to demonstrate that women did follow

the available patterns, most often from hoary Old Testament stories.’¹⁵ Whether or not we view, with Orlin, needlework as an explicit instrument of social control, it has undeniable links with women’s wider domestic environments. Since the V&A Magdalene does not fit easily into established understandings of embroidery’s meaning and purpose for those who created and viewed it, the object raises questions about the context in which it was worked, and the wider significance of embroidered pictures within the home.

Studying embroidery

The development of the historiography of domestic embroidery, well covered elsewhere, can be usefully summarised here by comparing the following.¹⁶ This, from 1946, is Nancy Cabot, writing in *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*:

*For one with leisure, who is interested in embroidered pictures [...] I can recommend the search for sources of design in Scriptural subjects in English needlework. It is a singular delight, involving an intimate knowledge of lovely old embroideries and an extensive study of early prints and book illustrations, with the occasional gratification of being able to fit the two arts together like pieces of a glorified picture puzzle.*¹⁷

This, from 2010, is Susan Frye in her *Pens and Needles: Women’s*

Textualities in Early Modern England:

This chapter, (entitled 'Narratives of Agency in Women's Domestic Needlework') describes how women in the household continuously shaped their environment by creating objects that expressed their always evolving identities [...] A woman's embroidery of biblical Women Worthies allowed her to express connections with female exemplars known for their personal virtue and beauty, as well as for adventures marked by eroticism and violence, all within the socially sanctioned activity of sewing.¹⁸

That the historiography of embroidery has evolved from a 'picture puzzle', attending to the discovery and explication of the subjects of specific embroideries, to a source used to uncover early modern women's voices and agency, is of course thanks to the continued influence of Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* and her insight that 'to know the history of

embroidery is to know the history of women'.¹⁹

Following Parker's lead, scholars have continued to use women's domestic embroidery to illuminate the mental and social worlds of women who left scant textual evidence, although these studies debate the extent to which embroidery can be considered an authentic articulation of women's creative agency.²⁰ The focus remains, however, on the intellectual significance of needlework as an activity and on embroideries as the product of a dynamic relationship between subject and object at the point of creation. As such, the debate centres on two sides of the same coin: can embroidery, as Frye argues, be an insight into women's thought processes, powers of invention, and potentially subversive identification with powerful figures; or, rather, should it be understood simply as evidence of women following generic patterns and prescriptive ideals?

This discussion starts from the notion that both scenarios can be,

separately and simultaneously, correct, but that both centre on embroidering as an act or as a behaviour, and embroideries only secondarily as manifestations of ideas, rather than as material objects. Thus, the focus still remains on women's identification with the idealised function of needlework, taking contemporary domestic treatises at face value by understanding embroidery in terms of the internalisation of exemplary roles. However subversive these exemplars may be, this approach neglects the important relationships between people and

objects, and fails to consider the agency of the object as well as of its maker. While the work of Morral, Geuter and others has done much to consider embroidery within the social and domestic realms, the focus nonetheless often remains on the individual, with the assumption being that an embroidery's influence was personal, expressing meaning on behalf of its maker.²¹

This is certainly partly correct. Some women left us very clear indications of what they believed themselves to be doing, and clearly used needlework as a means of articulating their thoughts and feelings.²² At other times we can satisfactorily link a woman's biography to what we take their samplers to 'mean'.²³ Yet, we should

also stress embroidery's wider influence, which was, after all, made to be seen within the domestic sphere. We do not yet know enough about the exact uses of embroidered textiles, but as objects of high value they were used throughout the home as domestic furnishings, thus presumably neither confined to the female domain nor considered exclusively the product of female identity.

The study of Stuart needlework is sometimes evidence of what Stephen Kelly describes as 'historiography's wish [...] to instrumentalise things, to "diagnose" them as "symptoms" of pre-existing, and therefore pre-determining culture or history'.²⁴ Too often embroideries are seen as symptomatic of women's lives rather

than as objects that can shed new light on the early modern household. As Peter Stallybrass et al argue, if objects are to be useful historical sources they must take precedence in the study of history, coming before the human subject as opposed to necessarily deriving from it:

*The purpose [...] is not to efface the subject but to offset it by insisting that the object be taken into account. With such a shift it is hoped that new relations between subject (as position, as person) and object (as position, as thing) may emerge and familiar relations change.*²⁵

Therefore, I would like to suggest that a useful approach is to consider the post-production of needlework, analysing embroidery after the act of embroidering has ended. If we look at the iconography and form of embroidery less as an expression of social ideals or manifestation of the embroiderer's thoughts and feelings, and more as evidence regarding its intended use, we may gather clues about how it was perceived and,

crucially, how it was incorporated into the household upon completion.

The uses of embroidered pictures

Despite anxiety about the dangers of idolatry, there is ample evidence that post-Reformation homes continued to be full of religious images. Tara Hamling has demonstrated the extent to which explicitly religious imagery survived in self-consciously Protestant domestic settings, and we know that pictorial embroideries on religious themes were worked into objects for the home, such as cushions and book coverings.²⁶ Women's domestic needlework and embroidery was 'also used to ornament bed furnishings, wall hangings, and seats for stools and

chairs'.²⁷ There is some evidence that embroidered pictures were framed, although according to Kathleen Staple's research there is a complete absence of documentary proof that pictorial embroideries were hung as 'pictures' in the modern sense of the term. While many homes did display images on the walls, the indications are that these pictures 'were paintings and prints; no needlework or embroidery was mentioned' in the sources. Staples concludes that the fashion for framing embroidered pictures in the late 17th century might relate to the popularity of 'stumpwork' – a 19th-century term used to describe raised embroidery – which would have rendered the piece impractical for domestic furnishing.²⁸

As a piece of traditional 'flat' needlework, measuring approximately 40 cm by 46 cm, it is more probable that the V&A embroidery was worked into a cushion top. The size of the piece, as well as the border surrounding the central image, implies that this was a self-contained 'short' cushion top as opposed to part of a larger 'long'

cushion, but we cannot preclude the possibility that it was worked into a larger embroidery. Moreover, this piece may have been part of a sequence; according to Hamling's research on extant examples, 'religious subject matter seems to have been fairly common as decoration for tapestry cushions and a set of cushions could provide a whole narrative with each cushion depicting a single episode'.²⁹

Without knowing the specific nature of their use it is difficult to discern the extent to which embroidered images on a religious theme should be characterised as fundamentally 'religious' images. As Mary Brooks explains, 'It is debatable how much the biblical 'kits', stitched by unidentifiable women [...] can inform

us about the religious sensibilities of the embroiderers'.³⁰ It is perhaps more valid to see these objects as part of a repertoire of mainstream images which existed in a culture infused with Christian stories and imagery. Cushions depicting biblical heroines were embroidered by women and young girls to contribute to the 'household store'. As such they were social objects, integrated into the richly visual setting of the 17th-century home; biblical in theme rather than expressly religious in nature.

However there is also evidence that embroidered cushions had specifically religious uses. They were placed on altars and tables to support books and also served liturgical functions, even within Protestant settings.³¹ Celia Fiennes, who travelled around England at the turn of the 18th century, recorded that on the altar at Canterbury Cathedral books rested on top of cushions when they were opened for use in services.³² As such, pictorial embroideries must also have had specifically religious as well as social uses and associations.

Mary Magdalene and the embroidery



Figure 4 – Geneva bible with embroidered binding, Anne Cornwallis, England, about 1650, silk and metal thread on white silk. Museum no. PML 17197.1. © The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York

The medieval cult of Mary Magdalene was one of the most popular across Europe, making her the favourite female saint from the 13th century onwards. As the epitome of the penitent sinner, the

prostitute redeemed through pious contrition and love of Christ, she served as a model for penitential associations and confraternities, and was a popular subject for medieval sermons about the necessity of repenting of lives of luxury and sin.³³ A composite figure derived from various passages in the Bible, the Magdalene provided a flexible and multifaceted character, and scholars of early modern manifestations of her cult emphasise its malleability.³⁴ Rather than being swept aside during the Reformation, Mary Magdalene persisted as a very popular figure within the Protestant Church; as a biblical figure, her feast day was still included within the Protestant liturgical calendar. Mary Magdalene endured because she could be adapted to suit the changing needs of both Catholics and Protestants in post-Reformation England. In the Catholic Church, she became an emblem of Catholics' spiritual connection with Christ, while in the Protestant tradition she served as a model of the sinner reformed through personal piety and penitence.³⁵

An embroidered book cover in the Morgan Library shows the Protestant attachment to Mary Magdalene in her early modern guise as repentant sinner (fig. 4). Made as the cover for a Geneva Bible, it was embroidered by Anne Cornwallis around the time of her marriage to Samuel Leigh in about 1650. The embroidery shows Adam and Eve on the front, and, illustrating the redemptive counterpoint of the New Testament to the Old, the resurrected Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene on the back. As in the V&A Magdalene, the instruments of the Passion frame the central scene.

Anne Cornwallis depicted a traditional *Noli me tangere* scene: the moment at which Mary Magdalene encounters the newly resurrected Christ. The scene is based on an episode in John's Gospel, in which Mary has gone to Christ's tomb to anoint his body, and is dismayed to find the tomb empty. Upon realising that Jesus's body has been removed, Simon Peter and another unnamed disciple return home:

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' She saith unto them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom

seekest thou?’ She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, ‘Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus saith unto her, ‘Mary.’ She turned herself, and saith unto him, ‘Rabboni’; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, ‘Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.’³⁶

The moment at which Jesus admonishes Mary, ‘Touch me not’, *noli me tangere*, marks a crucial moment in Christian theology, and forms the basis of a long tradition in Western art.³⁷ In Anne Cornwallis’s embroidery, its significance is seen in conjunction with the story of Adam and Eve, in a design that while based on pre-Reformation iconography is clearly ‘created [...] around a coherent typological theme, which is deeply imbued with an understanding of the redemptive purposes of Scripture’.³⁸ The adapted re-use of printed patterns

and designs throughout the 16th and 17th centuries meant there was no sudden break with much of the visual culture of the past; where imagery was deemed idolatrous and proscribed, alternatives emerged in its place.³⁹ As shown by Anne Cornwallis’s embroidery, the instruments of the Passion survived into the 1640s, enduring ‘in post-Reformation iconography as an acceptable substitution for direct depictions of the passion’.⁴⁰ One step removed from a direct representation of Christ’s body, the symbols of his torture evidently still had strong associations with his corporeal presence.



Figure 5 – Scene from the Passion of Christ, part of an embroidered valance, unknown maker, France/Scotland, late 16th century, silk thread on canvas. Museum no. CIRC.402-1911. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Other pictorial embroideries dating from the late 16th and early 17th

centuries also demonstrate that New Testament narratives could survive in embroidered form. Two pieces in the V&A's collection, evidently part of a series depicting the Passion, show Christ being crowned with thorns, and the Crucifixion (figs 5 and 6). However while these objects have been cited as proof of the unproblematic continuation of traditional iconography in England,⁴¹ their style – particularly the use of perspective and elaborate foliate columns – is more in keeping with Franco-Scottish work, and their quality suggests they are likely the work of a professional rather than an amateur embroiderer.⁴²

More certainly of English manufacture is a needlework picture depicting scenes from Christ's Nativity, showing the angel's appearance to the shepherds and their adoration at the manger (fig. 2).



Figure 6 – Scene from the Passion of Christ, part of an embroidered valance, unknown maker, France/Scotland, late 16th century, silk thread on canvas. Museum no. CIRC.403-1911. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

These examples show that although unusual, embroideries depicting New Testament scenes, including images of Mary Magdalene, are not unheard of. In Anne Cornwallis's needlework, as in other *Noli me*

tangere imagery, Mary Magdalene is engaged within a narrative scene, a character depicted in the act of penitence, her presence contained within the confines of a story from the bible. What is most striking in the V&A's embroidery is the prominence of Mary herself, marking this object out as radically unusual within the genre of pictorial embroidery. She is located within a conflated image of the site of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, yet not illustrative of any specific point in the biblical narrative. The importance of narrative illustration in

the Protestant justification of images was instrumental to contemporaries understanding them as portrayals of instructive ideals rather than static foci of idolatry, and this convention is adhered to without exception in the biblical embroidered pictures I have seen. Moreover, as with the other types of 'safe' religious images from this period, the lines of relationship in Cornwallis's *Noli me tangere* exist firmly between characters within the object, rather than between the object and the beholder.⁴³



Figure 7 – Repentant Mary Magdalene, painting, Titian, Italy, 1560s, oil on canvas. Museum no. GE-117. © Vladimir Terebenin/The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

The V&A embroidery sits within a different visual tradition from that of English pictorial embroidery, being more easily comparable to the depictions of Mary Magdalene as a penitent in the wilderness that became popular during the early 16th century. Exemplified by Titian's sexualised, Venus-like pose, which became the prototype for images of the Magdalene throughout the 17th

century (fig. 7), Mary had evolved from a hirsute ascetic, in the style of St Jerome, to a become more sexualised figure whose past, bodily sins were bound up with her physical appearance.⁴⁴

Images from paintings and prints did filter down to form the basis of patterns for embroidery, and while no clear print source has been found, a popular image of the penitent Magdalene in the wilderness could have been adapted and simplified either by a professional draughtsman, or the embroiderer herself (figs 8 and 9). The needlework picture does not show any traces of an outline drawn by a professional pattern drawer, although given its good condition there are few places where the canvas is exposed by worn thread (fig. 10). Alternatively, if the image had been transferred to the canvas by the embroiderer through pricking and marking with pounce, any vestiges of the original outline would have long since disappeared.



Figure 8 – The Magdalene Repentant, print, Francesco Cozza, Italy, 1650, etching. The Illustrated Bartsch. Vol. 41, Italian Masters of the Seventeenth Century (New York: Abaris Books, 1987). © ARTstor



Figure 9 – The Penitent Magdalene, print, Wenceslaus Hollar after Holbein, England, 1638, etching. University of Toronto

The figure representing Faith here holds a book and a cross.⁴⁵



Figure 10 – Verso of Mary Magdalene Surrounded by Instruments of the Passion, embroidered picture, unknown maker, England, mid-17th century. Museum no. T.18-1940. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 11 – Dish decorated with figures emblematic of 'Fecundity', unknown maker, earthenware, Southwark, London, about 1635, tin-glazed earthenware, press-moulded and painted. Museum no. C.32-1928. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Prints are not the only possible source of inspiration for the embroidery's design. The iconographic similarities between the Magdalene and other nude female figures means that her pose could also have been adapted from an entirely different image. Her reclining form bears similarities to emblematic female figures representing fecundity, as in the dishes made in Southwark during the 17th century (fig. 11), and personifications of the theological virtues such as those found in a set of Italian hanging pockets now in St John's House Museum, Warwick.

Whatever her source, while the embroiderer has taken care to include the Magdalene's traditional identifying symbols – long hair, a jar of ointment, a skull and a cross – there is a marked difference between typical imagery and the embroidered version. In the latter, the cross is so large it appears less an attribute than a context; Mary is apparently present in the landscape of Christ's sacrifice, rather than situated in an anonymous wilderness. This is a slightly

contentious point, as early modern embroiders adopted a very flexible approach to relative size. Mary Brooks attributes incongruities in scale to the embroiderers' method of copying designs from printed sources through pricking rather than scaling, but pattern books such as Shorleyker's *A schole-house for the needle* (1632) did include grids for scaling, and this would have been a fairly simple section to make smaller.⁴⁶



Figure 12 – The Penitent Magdalene, painting, unknown maker, England, 1570–99, oil on panel. Museum no. 1430471. © National Trust Images

Therefore while needlework always maintained an independent aesthetic taste and formal tradition that cannot be reduced to available print sources, the composition of the image arguably also distances this embroidery from typical penitent Magdalene iconography. Engaging its beholder, it makes sense less as a narrative illustration of a biblical scene, or exemplar of moral behaviour, than as a devotional image. In doing so, it has the flatness of an icon, an invitation for the more metaphysical kind of

contemplation associated with affective Catholic worship, and with the Magdalene in her role as the conduit of religious experience.

Catholic devotion to Mary Magdalene



Figure 13 – Embroidered altar frontal, unknown maker, England, about 1600, satin with silk embroidery. Museum no. 817-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

While her popularity was not confined to Catholics, Mary Magdalene has a distinguished place in Counter-Reformation worship. Recent scholarship has focused on the Magdalene's role as a physical connection to the body of Christ, analysing how her loss of Christ's body served as a parallel to Catholics' loss of his sacramental presence. As Patricia Badir explains, 'In diverse early modern sources, the Magdalene is an exemplar of visible things able to give imaginative form to the events central in Christian culture [...] [She has the] ability to materialise the immaterial,

lending appreciable shape to the experience of faith'.⁴⁷ This conceptualisation of the Magdalene was particularly resonant with English Catholics of the early modern period as 'Mary Magdalene and English Catholics shared a common trial of faith – the loss of Christ's body'.⁴⁸ In this way, the figure of the Magdalene served as a focal point for Catholics, a powerful symbol of enduring Christian memory.

One way in which English Catholics maintained an active memory of their proscribed faith was through objects. Despite widespread destruction of Catholic material culture, we know from contemporary inventories that some

households maintained the material trappings of Catholicism, including paintings and textiles. The Northampton home of the Catholic Earl of Northampton, Henry Howard, contained tapestries of the Story of Christ, and images of the Virgin Mary, St Francis, Christ holding his cross, and the three Marys at Christ's tomb.⁴⁹ A late 16th-century painting on panel now in the National Trust's collection at Chastleton House shows a penitent Magdalene reading, although it is unknown whether the painting formed part of the collection of the Catholic – and Gunpowder Plotter – Robert Catesby who owned the original Chastleton (fig. 12). Some Catholic houses also included 'hiding places for the altar furniture, books, vestments and other necessary paraphernalia' for Catholic mass.⁵⁰ These objects were often richly embroidered with images of saints, such as an altar cloth decorated with 16th-century needlework, including an image of Mary Magdalene, thought to have come from the Catholic Huddlestone family of Sawston, Cambridgeshire (fig. 13).

Another means of keeping the Catholic faith alive was through transmission of texts. Both men and women were engaged in circulating illicit religious ideas via manuscript and print networks, and extant manuscripts and printed texts show how such poems were copied and reproduced, as well as adapted and expanded.⁵¹ Helen Hackett's recent article on women's participation in mid-17th-century Catholic manuscript networks draws attention to the literary and meditational practices of the Counter Reformation in England. Taking as her point of departure a verse miscellany by Constance

Aston Fowler (1621?-64), Hackett demonstrates how English Catholics transmitted and added to 'Catholic traditions of the past' by engaging in Loyolan 'composition of place'. As the focus for affective veneration of Christ, Mary Magdalene enjoyed a privileged position within such manuscripts, and 'verses to [her] written by English Catholics after the Act of Uniformity were among the most popular devotions to be circulated among English Catholics'.⁵²

One such form of affective veneration was *The Poetry of Tears*, an explicitly Catholic form of meditational devotion to the Magdalene, most notably expounded

by the Jesuit priest Robert Southwell.⁵³ Southwell was executed for treason in 1595, but his poems were reprinted at least nine times by the 1640s, including twice by clandestine presses, and were undoubtedly in covert circulation throughout the 17th century. His treatises included Saint Mary Magdalen's funeral Teares for the death of our Saviour (1591) and a poem, Marie Magdalens complaint at Christ's death. Together with Gervase Markham's Marie Magdalens Lamentations for the Losse of her Maister Jesus (1604), John Sweetnam's Mary Magdalens Pilgrimage to

Paradise (1617), Saint Marie Magdalen's Conversion (1603) by an author known only as I.C., and numerous poems by the exiled Catholic layman Richard Verstegan (d. 1636), they form the basis of a corpus of work centred on the Magdalene's grief and sense of loss at the discovery of Christ's empty tomb.⁵⁴ She is, as Markham puts it, 'mournfully searching for something real to hold'. As English Catholics too sought some tangible symbol of their faith, they imaginatively participated in what Michael O'Connell has called the 'incarnational religious

aesthetic' of early modern Catholicism.⁵⁵ Rather than focusing on Mary's role as penitent, the poetry of tears instead emphasises her power as 'a worldly link to the resurrection'.⁵⁶

The explicitly bodily nature of the V&A's embroidery emphasises the Magdalene's connective presence to the sacrificial body of Christ, evoked through the surrounding instruments of the Passion, and it is tempting to ask whether contact with such an object could make the beholder feel closer to Christ's comforting presence. Sophia Holroyd has documented examples of women using needlework 'as both subject and structuring device for deep-focused meditation', which raises the possibility that the embroidery could have functioned within the context of affective Catholic worship and the aesthetics of recusant domestic space.⁵⁷ In the absence of official, public outlets of Catholicism, 'the household was the crucial site of both observance and

resistance' and women often played an integral role in ensuring households maintained Catholic devotions. In many documented cases, 'the husband would conform outwardly, attending church to protect property and maintain access to office, while the wife would oversee Catholic devotions in the home and maintain the family's Catholic identity'.⁵⁸

By its very nature covert religious practices are hard to unearth and complex to interpret. We have no way of knowing how many similar embroideries of the Magdalene may have been made and have been lost or destroyed over time. However if we, with McClain, are 'willing to look in new directions, for new incorporations of the Magdalene in larger patterns of worship' the V&A's embroidery might provide further clues as to how material objects made by women contributed to Catholic devotion in the 17th century.⁵⁹ While a piece of domestic needlework lacks the full aesthetic and imaginative impact we today associate with artistic production, it is important not to underestimate

the power of an image like this in the post-Reformation period, nor to forget that Catholics risked their lives to keep the material culture of their faith, as the tools and token of worship were channelled into a more 'adaptive, transportable, clandestine devotional practice'.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In an effort to make sense of this unusual object, consisting of unfamiliar design, anonymous manufacture, uncertain date and unknown provenance, this discussion has separated it from both modern and historic assumptions surrounding women's needlework. By focusing on the visual qualities of the embroidery-as-object, rather than the rhetoric

surrounding embroidery-as-activity, it proposes an analytical model as an opportunity to expand the historiography of embroidery design into something more than the history of embroidery.⁶¹

I have no wish to deny women's intellectual or creative agency in their needlework, and presume that like most forms of production there are degrees to which individuals conceptualised it as a form of expression; embroidery was neither simply 'decorative brainwashing' nor purely authentic voice. Equally, I have no doubt that many women did embroider exemplary female figures as a means of identifying with heroic role models. Yet this object shows the limitation of this interpretation; if this Magdalene invites identification with an idealised role, it is as psychological attachment rather than moral exemplarity.

Moreover, the association of embroidery with women's history has meant that embroideries are often considered only in the realm of the feminine, as a 'potential means to investigate women's history' rather

than the history of which women are a part, and in which they suffer from anonymity.⁶² In the absence of biographical information about many makers of material culture, there has to be an alternative way of addressing such objects. If there is not, anonymous, domestic objects (and their often female creators) are disproportionately absent from our historical understanding.

Considering embroidery as part of the domestic space inhabited by both genders adds to a wider story which encompasses religion, politics, and wider society. As Dolan argues, 'Viewing the household as

the base of operations for Catholics offers yet another challenge to the notion that the private was a distinctly separate or apolitical realm in the early modern period.'⁶³ This embroidery does not alone prove anything; rather it contributes to a process by which the layering of small, unremarkable objects creates a clearer picture of the hidden understandings that are expressed through daily, conscious and unconscious interaction with things.⁶⁴

Endnotes

1. The daughter of Dr George Harley, an eminent Scottish physician, Ethel Brilliana Harley married Alexander

- Tweedie in 1887. Following the death of both of her sons (the younger killed in action in 1916, the elder in an aircraft accident while serving in the RAF in 1926), she wished her collection to be used for the public good: ‘I think I had told you that both of my sons had fallen for this country and that therefore I wanted to give everything I could to the country for the furtherance of education’. Letter from Mrs Alec Tweedie to the V&A, February 6, 1927. V&A object file MA/1/A313. For more on her activities as Secretary of the British Women’s Produce League see ‘Women’, *The Nursing Record and Hospital World*, April 25, 1896, 343.
2. V&A object file MA/1/A313. One can only speculate upon Mrs Tweedie’s interest in this embroidery, but the iconography of Christ’s Passion may have related to her book about the Bavarian Oberammergau Passion Play. Ethel Alec Tweedie, *The Oberammergau Passion Play* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1890).
 3. Mrs Tweedie’s interest in the ‘womanly’ accomplishment of embroidery could bring her some frustration. The introduction to *My Table-cloths* humorously notes that as someone who had ‘written sixteen volumes by the sweat of my brow, to say nothing of new editions and translations, and [having] done a few minor things in the world beside stitching’, she was ‘cut to the heart to find my name associated with nothing but table-linen’. Ethel Alec Tweedie, *My Table-cloths; A Few Reminiscences* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 1.
 4. Some clarifications of vocabulary are necessary here. By ‘domestic’ I mean made in the home for use in the home rather than merely made in the home for sale elsewhere. There is also a technical distinction between embroidery and needlework though I will use the terms interchangeably – strictly speaking, embroidery is embellishment on a fabric background; this picture is needlework, which denotes stitching on canvas. Finally I am making an assumption about the gender of the embroiderer. While professional embroidery was certainly done by men, who sometimes worked from their homes, domestic work made in the home for the home was characteristically done by women.
 5. For these observations I am grateful to Clare Browne, Senior Curator in Textiles and Fashion at the V&A, without whose expertise and generosity this article could not have been written. For examples of Franco-Scottish embroidery, see Maria-Anne Privat-Savigny, *Quand Les Princesses D’Europe Brodaient* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2003).

6. Ruth Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context', in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580–1700*, ed. by Andrew Morrall and Melinda Watt (New York: Yale University Press, New Haven and The Bard Graduate Center, 2008), 63.
7. Ruth Geuter, 'Women and Embroidery in Seventeenth-Century Britain: The Social, Religious and Political Meanings of Domestic Needlework', (PhD thesis, University of Wales, 1996): vol. 1, 276–7, Table 1, List of Catalogued Subjects; vol. 2, 460–98, Appendix G, Catalogue of 17th-century Embroideries.
8. Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives', 63.
9. Andrew Morrall, 'Regaining Eden: Representations of Nature in Seventeenth-Century English Embroidery', in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. by Morrall and Watt, 79.
10. The V&A's National Art Library holds 60 original embroidery books from the period 1523–1700, including the only extant copy of Richard Shorleyker, *A schole-house for the needle*, (London, 1632).
11. Quoted in Mary M. Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: In the Collection of the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2004), 13.
12. Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 22.
13. Some of the most popular patterns were adapted from Continental print sources, notably *Thesaurus sacrarum historiarum veteris testamenti* (Antwerp: Gerard de Jode, 1585), a book of biblical stories.
14. The author has consulted numerous collections of embroideries and a variety of specialists in the field, including curators of textiles at the V&A, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
15. Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation, and Stitchery', in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. by Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 189.
16. For example, Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 162–5.
17. Nancy Graves Cabot, 'Pattern Sources of Scriptural Subjects in Tudor and

- Stuart Embroideries', *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* 30 (1946): 3.
18. Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 116–8.
 19. Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Woman's Press Ltd, 1984).
 20. In contrast with Parker and Frye, Lena Cowen Orlin sees the silent needlework done by women as symptomatic of 'self-abnegation' rather than autonomy. Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance', 185.
 21. See Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, passim.
 22. For examples of women's writing 'explaining' their embroideries, see Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 15–16.
 23. See Michael Bath, *Emblems for a Queen: The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Archetype Publications, 2008).
 24. Stephen Kelly, 'In the Sight of an Old Pair of Shoes', in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings*, ed. by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 62.
 25. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, eds, *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.
 26. Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
 27. Kathleen Staples, 'Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage', in *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. by Morrall and Watt, 32.
 28. Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 34.
 29. Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 211.
 30. Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 15.
 31. Santina Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall* (Great Britain: National Trust, 2007), 31.
 32. Celia Fiennes, *Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary* (London: Field and Tuer, The Leadenhall Press, 1888), 103.
 33. I have relied heavily on Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (London: Harper Collins, 1993). For

- the medieval cult of the saint see chapter V, 'Beata Peccatrix'.
34. Patricia Badir, *The Maudlin Impression: English literary images of Mary Magdalene, 1550–1700* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 2.
 35. Lisa McClain, "'They have taken away my Lord": Mary Magdalene, Christ's Missing Body, and the Mass in Reformation England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 38. 1 (2007): 81.
 36. John 20:1–18, King James Version.
 37. For a history of *Noli me tangere* imagery, see Barbara Baert 'The Gaze in the Garden: Body and Embodiment in "Noli me tangere"', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (2008): 15–39.
 38. Morrall, 'Regaining Eden', 85.
 39. Lists of print sellers' stock in the 17th century show that old print sources were continually recycled. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 82–4.
 40. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 175–6.
 41. Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 213.
 42. I am grateful to Clare Browne for her observations on this point.
 43. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 186.
 44. For detailed information about the evolving identity of Mary Magdalene, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor*, particularly chapter VII, 'The Weeper'.
 45. Mary M. Brooks and Sonia O'Connor, 'The Use of X-radiography in the analysis and conservation documentation of a set of seventeenth-century hanging wall pockets', in *X-Radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects*, eds Sonia O'Connor and Mary Brooks (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, 2007), 231–6.
 46. Shorleyker, *A schole-house for the needle*.
 47. Badir, *The Maudlin Impression*, 14–15.
 48. McClain, "'They have taken away my Lord'", 78.
 49. Sophia Jane Holroyd, 'Embroidered rhetoric: the social, religious and political functions of elite women's needlework, c.1560–1630', (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2002), 160.
 50. Holroyd, 'Embroidered rhetoric', 201.
 51. For example, in an early 17th-century manuscript version of *Mary Magdalens Lamentations for the Losse of her Maister Jesus in the Cheshire*

- City Archive* is a copy of Gervase Markham's 1604 versification of Robert Southwell's Mary Magdalens Tears for the death of our Saviour (1591). McClain, "They have taken away my Lord", 77.
52. Helen Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler's Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65. 4 (2012): 1099-100. See also: Patrick Collinson, Arthur Hunt and Alexandra Walsham, 'Religious Publishing in England 1557-1640', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*. Volume 4: 1557-1695, ed. by John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie, with the assistance of Maureen Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 29-66; Alexandra Walsham, "Domme Preachers"? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print', *Past and Present* 168 (2000): 72-123.
53. Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57.
54. McClain, "They have taken away my Lord", 82.
55. Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47.
56. McClain, "They have taken away my Lord", 89.
57. Holroyd, 'Embroidered rhetoric', 155-6.
58. Frances Dolan, 'Gender and the "Lost" Spaces of Catholicism', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32. 4 (2002): 652-4.
59. McClain, "They have taken away my Lord", 81.
60. Dolan, 'Gender and the "Lost" Spaces of Catholicism', 664.
61. This is in contrast with Orlin, who considers her work on the subject to outline 'less historical practice than cultural myth about the role of stitchery'. Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance', 199.
62. Ruth Geuter, 'English Figurative Embroideries', in *Gender and Material Culture in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (Hampshire and New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 106.
63. Dolan, 'Gender and the "Lost" Spaces of Catholicism', 655.
64. See Patricia Fumerton on 'successive anecdotalism', in 'Introduction: A New New Historicism', in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. by Fumerton and Hunt, 4.

Printed Sources for a South German Games Board

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Abstract

A late 16th-century, south German
games board, now in the Victoria

and Albert Museum, London, is
veneered with ebony and engraved
bone. By identifying the print
sources for most of the engraved
ornament, and analysing their
selection and use, a clearer picture
is offered of the board's design,
manufacture and uses.

Introduction



Figure 1 – Games board, unknown maker, Germany (probably Augsburg), 1582–1610; wood veneered with ebony and engraved bone, with gilt-metal hinges and lock. Museum no. 567-1899. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In 1899 the South Kensington Museum, London (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) purchased a games board veneered with ebony and lavishly engraved bone (figs 1–3); no playing pieces (or key) were included with the board.¹ In his introduction to the catalogue of the Forman sale, from which the board was sold shortly before it was purchased by the Museum, Cecil H. Smith notes that William Henry Forman built up his collection of *objets de vertu* and antiquities ‘in

the middle years of the 19th century, mainly from purchases at London sales’.² The board was already known to the Museum, having been exhibited there, as part of the South Kensington Museum Special Loan Collection, 1862.³ Indeed its inclusion in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue may have helped foster a market interest in such boards; similar examples were later owned or published by such eminent collectors of the day as Frédéric Spitzer, Baron Mayer de Rothschild and Henry, 15th Duke of Norfolk.⁴



Figure 2 – Games board. Museum no. 567-1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The form of a pair of boards hinged together is found in Europe from at least the 14th century and possibly much earlier; by the early 16th century, boards of similar proportions that close to form a shallow box were being made with

intarsia decoration, probably in southern Spain and/or Venice.⁵ Hinged games boards with engraved decoration on veneers of ivory or bone were a new variation, probably from about 1580, and one of the luxury products supplied by cabinet-makers in southern Germany, where the cities of Augsburg and Nuremberg were pre-eminent centres of design and luxury goods.⁶



Figure 3 – Games board. Museum no. 567-1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Open, the two hinged boards provide a playing surface for backgammon, with the raised edges preventing the counters from sliding off the boards; closed, they provide a board for chess or draughts and, inverted, another for merels (Nine Men's Morris), a game of ancient origin in which players seek to form lines of three pieces so as to reduce his opponent's pieces.⁷ The boards form a shallow box fitted with a sprung lock, which could be put to practical use to store the games pieces.⁸ The board's primary visual impact relies on the contrast of white bone with black ebony, and the multiplicity of engraved detail in more than 400 distinct figures or motifs, distributed over almost every surface. The engraved decoration of the board teems with eclectic variety, including ancient exemplars, hunts and battle scenes, dancing couples, birds and animals, sea-monsters, grotesque and Moresque ornament.

The prestige accorded such veneered and engraved games boards, sometimes further enhanced with silver and mother-of-

pearl, is demonstrated by their inclusion in the princely art cabinets (*Kunstschränke*) and the less extravagant but smaller writing tables (*Screibtische*) commissioned by Philipp Hainhofer (1578–1647), an Augsburg merchant, banker, diplomat and art collector...⁹ The design similarities between boards of this type suggest that it was becoming an established and successful type by 1600...¹⁰ Given the extraordinarily high number of cabinet-makers in Augsburg – in 1590 there were 200 masters with their own workshops – it seems likely that considerable numbers of engraved games boards

were being made during the period 1580–1620.¹¹

Commentaries on this type of engraved games board have approached them in various ways: seeking to establish groups of similar boards and locating their production in southern Germany, emphasising their suitability to a cabinet of curiosities, or exploring their iconographic values in the context of aristocratic games-playing.¹² Given the prominence and clarity of the engraved decoration, it is not surprising that its derivation from printed sources has been noted, but the unusually thorough analysis of the printed designs presented here offers a much more nuanced reading of such boards' design, manufacture and appreciation in use.¹³ This article seeks to analyse the decorative scheme of the V&A board by relating the engraved motifs to their printed sources, and to explore some of the board's various cultural and intellectual contexts. It proposes that the cabinet-makers who produced such boards employed a

skilful economy of batch production to create individualised luxury products, and suggests that the variety of engraved scenes inventively matches the games-playing that the board served.

Uses and meanings of the games board



Figure 4 – The Consequences of Alcoholism: Couple playing Tric-Trac, Jacob Matham, Haarlem, about 1621; engraving, 18.1 × 20 cm. Museum no. 1988,1210.5 © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

Backgammon, chess, draughts and merels were popular games at all social levels, and played by both men and women. The V&A board combined them in a luxury compendium.¹⁴ Games of strategy and pursuit were of course played for pleasure and intellectual exercise, then as now, but games were also a moral and social arena. Chess was commonly associated with courtly love, and seen as an enduring symbol of romantic engagement and intimacy.¹⁵ The Church's long-standing disapproval of game playing and gambling is reflected in contemporary moralising prints that highlight game

playing as a risky activity, associated with foolish, dissolute or violent behaviour (fig. 4). The couple shown poised over a games board represents a moment of fine social balance when an innocuous activity may chance to descend into disaster.¹⁶ In contrast, the moral and educational values of board games were also promoted over a long period in manuals and treatises, one of which was written by Augustus the Younger of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, who later ordered from Hainhofer the type of Augsburg *Kunstschränk* that contained a luxury games board.¹⁷

The decoration of the V&A's board embodies these ideas. Given that the games are a form of exercise for the (seated) players, it is apt that much of the engraved imagery relates to movement – chasing, lunging, pouncing, fluttering, dancing and striking. Battles and skirmish scenes are appropriate to strategies for chess; hunting scenes of chase and capture form a neat accompaniment to backgammon and draughts, and may also have appealed to the owner's sense of social rank through an evocation of aristocratic privileges and lifestyle. Sea-monsters might symbolise the 'peril' faced by the loser of the game, sphinxes the wisdom or cunning needed to win. Medallion heads of classical and biblical exemplars encourage reflection on moral and educational themes, for those who could recognise them, an invitation made explicit on comparable boards that include fables and proverbs.¹⁸ The anthropomorphic characteristics of the creatures depicted - lions (ferocious or playful), monkeys (mischievous or sinful), birds (wise, foolish, garrulous or argumentative) -

presumably imagined the behaviours of the players themselves. Dancing couples evoke the pleasures of social intercourse but also the opportunities that board games could provide for licensed and amorous competition between the sexes, overtly signalled in Matham's print (fig. 4).¹⁹ For those playing on the boards, winning or losing, the varied depictions of virtue, bravery and vice, wisdom and foolishness, reward and peril, offered a rich play of allusion and diversion perfectly in keeping with the games themselves.

The games board would have appealed to the intellect in two ways: through the range of allusion in its

engraved scenes, and – if it was an independent artefact rather than part of an ensemble – by association with similar engraved games boards incorporated within the ambitious *Wunderkammern* that portray different kinds of human knowledge.²⁰ In this context, we might also consider the extent to which the games board (and the games pieces themselves, probably also in bone and ebony, that were handled in contact with the board) made an intrinsic appeal to the mind and the senses through their materials and facture.²¹ The box is a superbly constructed ensemble of animal, vegetable and mineral products (bone and animal skin glue, woods, gilded metals), which were transformed through a range of artisanal skills into an artefact that is portable, mobile and tactile. Part of its allure lay in the hardness and lustre of the ebony (a wood that is exceptionally difficult to work), and its contrast with the white bone. Given that the bone may well have been regarded as ivory by contemporary viewers, just as it was in the 20th century, the use of these exotic materials in the

representation of European graphic imagery may also have been understood as a series of creative transformations; from raw to refined, material to imaginative, foreign to Germanic. The transactions effected by south-German trading networks that brought the raw materials so far across the globe and the manufacturing skills capable of exploiting them result in a product that appealed to the minds, hands and imaginations of its users.²²

How might the genesis of the engraved games board as a new product type have developed in southern Germany? The form of a hinged games board, richly decorated with figurative designs

was not in itself new to the region; in 1537 a magnificent board and counters with carved and inlaid wood plaques and medallions depicting imperial, dynastic, mythological, natural and hunting imagery was created by Hans Kels the Elder in Kaufbeuren near Augsburg, probably for King Ferdinand I, and is of sufficient complexity and richness that it might well have been celebrated in subsequent decades.²³ Later, the idea of applying local skills to luxury games boards may have been prompted by developments in Innsbruck, where in 1575–77 another lavish board with pieces was produced, probably for Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol.²⁴ This board, signed and dated by the court artist Hans Repfl, is configured for chess, merels and backgammon in the same way as the V&A board, and relates dynastic heraldry to cosmological themes using marquetry of wood and zinc, some based on Virgil Solis designs.

In terms of the black and white scheme of the board under discussion, there is an obvious visual

logic in translating engraved designs from one white surface (paper) to another (ivory or bone).²⁵

Indeed, the idea might seem at least in hindsight an obvious one to have occurred in a region with a well-developed print culture and an industry of engraving, on copper for prints and silver for luxury decorative products.²⁶

The engraved games board required the application of skills for which southern Germany was famous, from one medium to another, and combined two technologies that were distinctive to the region – engraving and the cutting of ebony. The board type may have offered a further attraction to cabinet-

makers in that it offered a luxury ebony product without the requirement of silver inlay or mounts, perhaps thus obviating or reducing the inconvenient dominance of goldsmiths in luxury product design.²⁷

Yet the translation of engraved images to a new medium is also a transformation, creating a product that unlike paper is inherently substantial, hard (yet smooth to the touch), durable and of demonstrably lasting quality, one that will not become torn, grubby or dog-eared through frequent use.

The handling of the games board as a functional three-dimensional object is also significant: its solidity yet relative light weight, and the

precision with which it opens with the satisfying click of its sprung catch, are evocative of the high quality technology, found in guns and clocks, for which southern Germany was famous.²⁸ We might further speculate whether the hinged action of the board evoked another type of engraved luxury product designed to appeal to the eye, imagination and the intellect: the large illustrated book, or more specifically, the atlas.²⁹ The 16th century saw the fundamental development of books of printed maps in Europe, with the significant milestone in 1570 of Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. In form, the games board is

reminiscent of a book with stiff board covers that are opened and closed, and is not dissimilar in size. The survival of a contemporary miniaturised, engraved metal games board that deliberately imitates the form of a book indicates that a correspondence might well be noticed.³⁰ The games board's surfaces offer the crisp, black and white clarity of the printed page. Like a map, the imagery of the games board is layered and non-sequential, demanding nimbleness of eye and mind, as the counters or pieces are moved across 'territory' to claim or control it, but unlike a map, the board – legible from both sides – really is a

stage for action and interaction on which the seated players enact the dramas of the games.

Could it also be argued that a more complex and ambitious allegorical meaning was intended for the games board, evoking such works as the 1537 Kaufbeuren games board mentioned above or Wendel Jamnitzer's mechanical fountain allegory of imperial rule commissioned by Maximilian II in 1556 and completed in 1578? The fountain, in which Jamnitzer 'attempted to replicate the entire divine, human and political cosmos', portrayed a vast range of imagery, including the Seasons, the Elements (with depictions of living creatures and human industry), Habsburg

emperors and peasant dances.³¹ In such terms, the board might be construed to portray the benefits and pleasures (from the noble hunt to peasant dances) of imperial rule, which defends its subjects militarily and extends over the creatures of land, sea and air. Furthermore, the arguments that have been made for the newly assertive character of artisan skill and knowledge in southern Germany at this period are perfectly applicable to the products of cabinet-makers.³² Given the disparity in scale and context between Jamnitzer's fountain and a luxury games board, such a claim might be pitched only half seriously (like the games enjoyed on the board), and the answer might be simply that players could construe a complex allegory if they were so inclined, or not, as the case may be.

Analysis of the print sources on the V&A games board



Figure 5 – Detail showing the eight roundels from games board. Museum no. 567-1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Having explored some possible uses and meanings of the board – social, moral, intellectual and technical – this article now considers the design sources. By probing beyond a general sense that the board relies on printed designs, and trying to map them in detail the intention here is to shed light on the processes of

design and manufacture. Much of the decoration on the V&A board uses as its design sources the prints of three printmakers: Virgil Solis (1514–62), Hans Collaert (about 1525–80) and Heinrich Aldegrever (1502–55/61), whose published works demonstrate that the board cannot have been made before 1582. The board is unlikely to date later than 1610, since it lacks the prominent bands of scrolling stem decoration which tend to characterise Augsburg ebony cabinet-makers’ work from about that date.³³



Figure 6 – Frieze with six busts, Virgil Solis, Nuremberg, 1530–62; etching, 3.0 × 16.8 cm. Museum no. D 8562 © Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

Two prints produced by Virgil Solis’s sizeable Nuremberg workshop were the sources for seven of the eight convex corner bosses on the exterior faces (fig. 5).³⁴ These are engraved with busts of ancient exemplars which are worn but still basically legible. Six heads can be identified from their inscriptions on

the Solis print showing a frieze with six busts, as Hector, Jahel, Haniwal (Hannibal), Esther, Judit and Josef (fig. 6). A seventh, the female head with headdress and streaming locks comes from a print showing four busts in medallions, which labels the head 'QU', but whose identity is uncertain. The eighth head, showing a bearded man in breastplate and helmet has not yet been identified. Those engraving the source prints onto bone enlarged and adjusted them to fit the circular format, simplifying some details, omitting the names and altering some of the necklines, perhaps reflecting the difficulty of

translating a flat design onto a convex surface.



Figure 7 – Detail from the external border showing hunting scene. Museum no. 567–1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Around the chess and merels boards, eight narrow panels (47 mm deep) show hunting friezes with 14 hunters on foot and 44 hounds hunting hares, boars and bears (fig. 7). Hunt friezes derived from Solis prints seem to be a common feature of engraved games boards, endorsing the 'immense popularity' of his single-sheet prints with craftsmen of the period.³⁵ On other games boards they are sometimes positioned on the raised borders around the backgammon boards, where they would be particularly appropriate for a game of pursuit.³⁶ In fact, these eight narrow friezes are each repeated once with minor changes, cleverly varied by the disposition of clouds and trees to punctuate the figures. Nine groups of figures have been selected from four or five Virgil Solis etched

hunting scenes, and repeated, sometimes reversed, in a tussocky landscape (fig. 8).³⁷ Along the narrow edges of both boards, narrow compartments (18 mm high) contain reduced versions of the same motifs, engraved at the same size as the prints themselves.



Figure 8 – Bear Hunt, Virgil Solis, Nuremberg, 1530–62; etching, 3.3 × 17.4 cm. Museum no. 1837.6.16.54 © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

The sources used were not only ornament prints. An undated set of etched playing cards by Virgil Solis, featuring suits of monkeys, parrots,

peacocks and lions, provided the sources for the monkeys, lions and at least two of the parrots which adorn the merels board (figs 9–12).³⁸ At the corners of the outer border are four monkeys aping human behaviour, taken from three cards of the suit: I, II and VI (fig. 10). Between the monkeys are 16 lions, mostly as paired, facing figures. These were selected and copied somewhat cursorily, from five cards: IIII, V, VI, VIII and × (fig. 11). The four parrots depicted singly in the corner roundels are simplified from three cards: IIII, VII and × (fig. 12). In the inner section are ten birds perched on branches, some of which may be read as eagles disputing with smaller birds, surrounding a central owl on a mound. These birds were selected from five engraved friezes with birds by Hans Collaert probably dating from the 1560s or early 1570s, which were based on friezes with birds designed by Virgil Solis during the second half of the 1550s (fig. 13).³⁹



Figure 9 – Detail of the external border, showing hunting scene



Figure 10 – Playing cards with monkeys



Figure 11 – Playing cards with lions



Figures 12 – Playing cards with parrots

The largest individual motifs on the board are the four sea monsters (fig. 14), aligned along the centre of the backgammon boards, where they would remain clear of tablemen (counters) during the game. They are arranged in confronting pairs, separated by facing sphinxes and book-ended by profile masks. These four monsters, supplemented by

four more, are also used on the borders of the chess and merels boards. All eight are taken from a set of prints entitled *Pars Altera*, designs for pendants by Hans Collaert, engraved by Adriaen Collaert, and published posthumously in Antwerp by Philips Galle in 1582 (figs 15a-d).⁴⁰ The monsters have been copied without their jewellery settings and relieved of their riders, save one which includes the figure of Tobias (and his dog), kneeling on the monster's back to cut out its heart, liver and gall. On the backgammon board the monsters have been reproduced closely but not exactly after the prints, three of them at the size they appear on the paper prints, the fourth slightly enlarged. On the borders to the chess and merels boards, the eight monsters, each shown twice, have generally been slightly reduced in height and their tails elongated to suit the long, narrow compartments on the boards. As the two or three monsters dependent on each model are portrayed with small variations in dimension, detail and treatment, it appears likely that they

were drawn separately and engraved on bone veneers by different hands, a possibility explored further below.

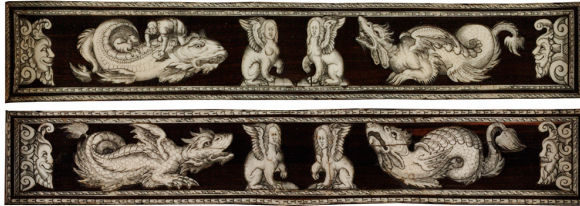
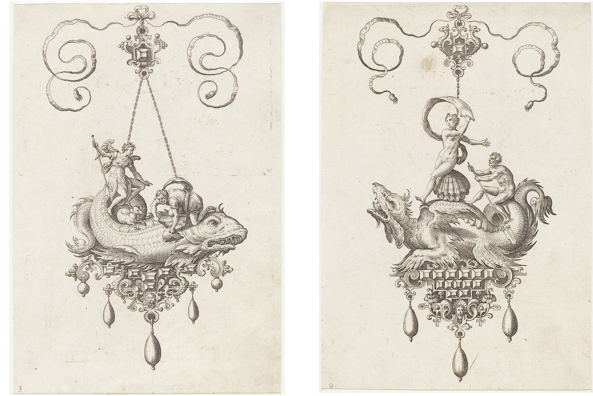


Figure 13 – Frieze with Fourteen Birds, designed and engraved by Hans I Collaert, Antwerp, probably 1560s or early 1570s; engraving, 3.7 × 19.1cm. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 14 – Two details from the backgammon boards. Museum no. 567-1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The facing sphinxes positioned between the monsters were probably adapted by the engraver, at approximately the same size as they were printed on paper, from an ornament print dated 1552 by Heinrich Aldegrever (fig. 16).⁴¹ At the ends of the backgammon centre panels are bearded profile strapwork masks, possibly adapted from those with protruding beards and curling topknots in prints by Lambrecht or Daniel Hopfer.⁴² Between each pair of monsters

surrounding the chess and merels boards is a breastplated merman with bifurcating tail, a widespread motif probably well-known from German prints derived from Italian works.⁴³



Figure 16 – Ornamental design with mask, two cornucopia of fruit and two sphinxes below, Heinrich Aldegrever, Soest, 1552; engraving, 14.7 × 5.3 cm. Museum no. 14031 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

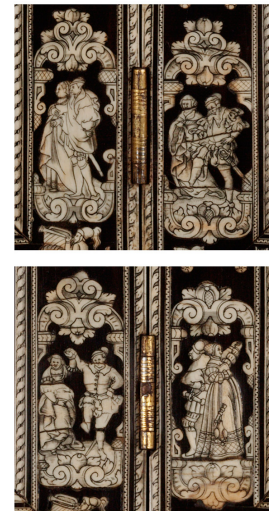


Figure 17a-b – Two details of wedding dancers, from the backgammon boards. Museum no. 567-1899 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Running down the central bars of the backgammon boards are four cartouches, each containing a dancing or processing couple in contemporary dress (figs 17a-b). Sources for the cartouches have not been found, but the couples are copied from two sets of engravings

by Heinrich Aldegrever, both known as *Small Wedding-Dancers*, two after prints from the 1538 set, and two from the 1551 set (figs 18a-d).⁴⁴



Figure 18 a-b – Two plates from the series ‘Small Wedding-Dancers’ (1538):(left) Dancing Couple, print, after Heinrich Aldegrever, Soest, engraving. Museum no. 1853,0709.192. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London(right) Dancing Couple, Back to Back, print, after Heinrich Aldegrever, Soest, engraving. Museum no. 29302.D. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 18 c-d – Two plates from the series ‘Small Wedding-Dancers’ (1551): (left) Dancing Couple, print, after Heinrich Aldegrever, Soest, engraving. Museum no. 24032.7. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (right) Dancing Couple with Arms Raised, print, after Heinrich Aldegrever, Soest, engraving. Museum no. 24032.8. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The flat, external borders (56 mm wide) of the backgammon boards are occupied by a frieze of Turkish and Christian horsemen (fig. 19), a theme that is also sometimes illustrated in the carved chess men on European (especially Spanish) boards in this period.⁴⁵

Their inclusion as borders to a game of aggressive skirmishing is appropriate, but they also reflect the reality of 16th-century Turkish military incursions towards Vienna. A clear source has not been identified but large single leaf, woodcuts of Turkish horsemen besieging Vienna (1529) by the Nuremberg designer and illustrator Niclas Stör (fl.

about 1520, d. 1562–3) may have provided a distant source for some of the figures.⁴⁶



Figure 19 – Detail of frieze showing Turkish and Christian horsemen. Games board, unknown maker, about 1581–1610, ebony. Museum no. 567-1899. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

On the backgammon board, the alternating triangular points, whether plain or Moresque, are separated by five pyramidal groups of grotesque figures, repeated across the four main panels. Print sources for these groups have not been found, though analogous characteristics can be seen in ornament prints by Sebald Beham (1500–50), Daniel Hopper (active in Augsburg 1493–1536), and Georg Pencz (active as a printmaker in Nuremberg from 1523), indicating the currency of such combinations.⁴⁷ The points themselves would have been relatively easy to adapt from printed

Moresque designs such as those by Virgil Solis.⁴⁸

The analysis of sources underlines both the heavy reliance on printed sources for the design of decorative luxury objects about 1600, and its creative and eclectic character.⁴⁹ In this instance motifs were selected from ornament prints, figure scenes, jewellery designs and playing cards. Some, such as the Hans Collaert sea monsters, were probably acquired only shortly before the manufacture of the games board, while others such as Aldegrever's wedding-dancers had been circulating for many decades. Ebony-veneered and engraved games boards, products most closely associated with Augsburg, may be added to the already extensive list compiled by Dieter Beaujean and Giulia Bartrum of art objects and articles for everyday use for which Virgil Solis prints provide patterns, providing further evidence, were any needed, of the lively and productive artistic interchange between Nuremberg and Augsburg.⁵⁰ The scale and

design of Solis's hunting prints – easily applicable with minimal scaling to the raised borders – must have made them especially inviting to use. The V&A board not only endorses their assertion of Solis's great influence via his single-leaf prints, but also highlights the applicability for decorative craftsmen of his playing cards. The use in south Germany of two sets of prints by a north German artist, Heinrich Aldegrever, reinforces the enduring popularity of his work during the 16th century with craftsmen as well as collectors.⁵¹ For the showpiece engravings at the heart of the board, the selection of Hans Collaert's prints published in Antwerp underlines the appeal of these designs for the creators of luxury goods other than goldsmiths, and beyond the Antwerp jewellery sector.⁵²

The organisation

of production

The analysis of print sources presented here provides a reasonably detailed 'map' (albeit with certain areas still fuzzy), but what does it reveal of the routes taken from the choice of designs to finished product by those actually involved in making the board. This is of particular note given the supposition that cabinet-makers and engravers, who practised quite separate trades, did not share workshops. How might the design and production of such boards with their multiplicity of engraved designs, so expertly marshalled, be organised? Was the engraving done to order, following a worked-up design with precise dimensions, or were the veneers on such boards engraved in batches to an agreed scale, to be bought in and selected from stock by a cabinet-maker? It is difficult to judge if a paper template or accurate sketch of the engraved scheme would have been warranted at any point. A paper record would

have served the interests of the client if s/he had a say in the composition, and assisted in creating a satisfactory composition without gaps, but may have been unnecessary if the cabinet-maker kept a stock of engraved veneers sized to fit standard boards. In this paperless scenario, the cabinet-maker could have composed the design, with or without the client's participation, placing stock veneers directly onto the bare wood boards, perhaps holding them lightly in place with wax or other tacky paste.⁵³

The number of engravers who contributed to the board is difficult to assess. The engraving, though superficially homogeneous, ranges in quality from the cursory to the beautifully controlled and textured. Further evidence that several engravers, working separately, were involved can be seen in those instances where the same motif has been treated with variations, as in the sea monsters on the borders. The transference from paper to bone involved several approaches. A few of the source prints, such as Aldegraver's dancing couples were

replicated essentially intact, and appear as freestanding motifs. Others were selected from larger, more complex prints, and sometimes adjusted to fit the veneer proportions. The main borders depicting military skirmishing and hunting use a third approach. Around the backgammon boards, about 70 mounted horsemen (and a few foot-soldiers) are shown fighting in twos and threes (fig. 19). They are armed variously with swords (or scimitars), pistols, spears, axes, bows and arrows, and carry shields, horns and two standards, one with a chequered design, the other with arrows and crescent moons. What

appears to be a running frieze of great variety actually consists of two short friezes, both repeated, to form the long sides of the open board; both ends of the open board consist of four small groups lifted from the two 'master' friezes and reconfigured, each small group made up of between two and five soldiers. This economical redistribution of motifs is particularly clever since the repetitions are almost impossible to discern when sitting at the board, the battle effect being one of continual, episodic to-and-fro.

While some designs on the V&A board required a modest degree of scaling up or down in the transfer to

bone, it is striking that various printed designs were engraved on bone at the same size as they had been printed on paper, or very close to it.

Aldegraver's dancing couples were replicated at this 'life size', inviting the possibility that the engraver pounced them (or a paper copy) directly onto the bone veneer, then interpolated some simple patterning, as on the women's dresses to suggest a contrasting fabric.⁵⁴ Evidently the engraving on bone could not replicate the full subtlety of expression and fine detail of the prints, but hatching and cross-hatching was employed to emulate the play of light

and shade represented in the print.

It is clear that the demands made by the cabinet-maker on the engravers were elaborate and specific. The engraved veneers were required in a range of set shapes and sizes with little margin for error. The eight corner bosses engraved with busts of the ancient Worthies use not just any piece of bone but the articular head (ball joint) of the femur, sawn from deer or cattle bones, with the central pit or fovea infilled with a bone peg.⁵⁵ The bosses serve a practical function by protecting the exposed surfaces of the main part of the board from abrasion, thus ingeniously making practical use of materials that were commonly available, if one knew where to look. The chequerboard squares or backgammon points with simpler decorative motifs might have been supplied by one engraver or workshop, the hunt scenes by a second, and the highly accomplished large sea monsters by another, but it would seem plausible that the engraver(s) used bone veneers

supplied by the cabinet-maker who had the resources to saw and scrape them to the necessary dimensions.⁵⁶ Practical wisdom might suggest that the veneers would be required with enlarged borders, allowing them to be trimmed at layout stage. The cropping that is visible on some engraved veneers such as the cartouches with the dancing couples, so that they fit the width of their bars, suggests either that the specification was inaccurate or that they were not made to measure for this particular games board. The idea that engraved veneers could be selected and assembled from ready-made stock is

supported by the more general evidence among surviving games boards of standardised dimensions, and the recurrence of similar motifs such as hunt scenes or ancient exemplars as described above.⁵⁷ Such a working model would allow the cabinet-maker to offer a recognised type of product that was nonetheless personalised to the client's own tastes, while also simplifying his production supply chain.

A logical conclusion to this discussion of how engraved games boards were produced could try to imagine the stages of assembly as they might have taken place in the cabinet-maker's workshop where the various constituent parts were brought together: the wooden carcass, the veneers and the gilded

metal hinges and catches. Once the carcasses of the two boards had been constructed using glued joints, the screwed hinges could have been fitted temporarily to ensure that the box would close snugly once finished, then removed until later. The likely order of assembly work for each face of each board, and the edges might be as follows: panels of dark veneer (cut to fit the standardised dimensions of boards) were laid over the wooden carcass, allowing for hardwood mouldings and metalwork. The engraved white panels (trimmed to fit if necessary) would be arranged to satisfaction on top of the dark (and

presumably recorded carefully in a sketch), outlined with a scoring tool, then removed so that the loose ebony panels could be sawn out using drills and bow saws, and the edges smoothed. The matched dark and white veneers would be reassembled on the carcass like a jigsaw puzzle, and glued down using animal skin glue, held under pressure. On the outer faces, corner bosses and mitred wooden mouldings carefully cut to size could then be pinned and glued into position, and the pinning concealed. To accentuate the design a dark pigment would be rubbed into the engraved lines (if this had not been

done already), and any surface finish such as beeswax applied to add lustre. The screwed hinges would be refitted, and the metal catch nailed in place.

Conclusion

As a compendium of war, chase and manoeuvre games, the striking appeal of the V&A games board rests on the teeming variety of its graphic decoration coupled with its controlled design and precise execution. For some original users it may also have resonated with more intellectual themes. For those actually playing games on the board, the engravings must have enhanced the experience by offering a rich play of allusion and diversion, both comic and competitive. An analysis of the sources shows that decorative motifs were selected from a wide range of print types produced in several printing centres over an

extended period of some 70 years, and re-engraved on bone to help create a distinctive luxury product, the engraved games board.

Furthermore, the indications that batch methods were used to produce individualised games boards of apparently inexhaustible decorative variety, suggest a very close working relationship between cabinet-makers and engravers, and a particularly flexible and efficient approach to design and manufacture.

Acknowledgments

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and Catherine Coueignoux for comments on the order of assembly; Angela McShane, Sarah Medlam, Elizabeth Miller and the two anonymous readers for their comments on the text.

Endnotes

1. Museum no. 567-1899; dimensions closed: length 41.5 cm × width 42 cm × depth 6.6 cm; the central wells 14 mm deep; the corner bosses 33–34 mm diameter. The boards are constructed on a wood carcass which is likely to be oak, and veneered with a tropical hardwood identified visually as ebony, *Diospyros crassiflora* (about 1.4 mm thick), and engraved bone (between 1.6 and 2.2 mm thick where visible), and with mitred, *cyma recta* mouldings of ebony; with two etched, gilt-metal butt hinges held by four hand-cut slotted screws (apparently original), hasp and plate with keyhole. Purchased for £115-10-0 from F. E. Whelan Esq., 6 Bloomsbury Street, W.6. via Rollin and Feuardent, (information taken from Museum registered file MA/1/R/475).

The board is currently displayed in the Medieval and Renaissance galleries at the V&A.

2. Messrs Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge, nos. 9–13 Wellington Street, Strand on the 19 June, 1899 and the three following days, lot 514. 'A backgammon and Draught board, of ebony, inlaid with bone, engraved most elaborately with grotesque monsters, hunting subjects, battle scenes &c., the hinges and lock of iron, richly gilt and chased with foliate patterns. Flemish or German work, circ. 1550. 16 ½ in. square; exhibited at S. K. M. Special Loan Collection, 1862.'

According to Smith's introduction to the sale catalogue, Forman's collection was housed at his home at Pippbrook House, near Dorking. After his death in about 1889, it passed to his sister-in-law Mrs Burt, and thence to his nephew Major A. H. Browne of Callaly Castle, Northumberland. Evidently, the collection was notable for Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities, but also contained (on the fourth day) silver, carvings, arms and metalwork, enamels, majolica, cuir bouilli, snuff boxes, mosaics and carvings (in which last category came lot 514).

3. John C. Robinson, ed., *Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Works of Art of the Medieval, Renaissance, and More Recent Periods, on Loan at the*

- South Kensington Museum, June 1862* (London: Printed by George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode for H. M. Stationary Off., 1862), Part V. Section 37 - Miscellaneous objects, 693, no. 7,878. 'Backgammon and draught-board in ebony, enriched with engraved ivory(sic) inlay representing grotesque monsters, hunting subjects, battle pieces, &c. The hinges and lock, of silver gilt iron, are chased with foliated patterns. Flemish or German work about 1550. Square, 16 ½in. W. H. Forman, Esq.'
4. For the Spitzer board, now at the Milwaukee Art Museum, see Frédéric Spitzer, *La Collection Spitzer: Antiquité, Moyen-Age, Renaissance* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1892), vol. 5, 253, no. 2, pl. 64; *Catalogue des Objets d'Art...Collection Spitzer*, Paris, June 16, 1893, vol. 1, 217, lot 2989, vol. 2, pl. LXIV; Elizabeth Ourusoff de Fernandez-Gimenez, catalogue entry in Laurie Winters et al, *A Renaissance Treasury. The Flagg Collection of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Milwaukee Art Museum* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1999), no. 40, 94–6; for the Rothschild board see Sotheby's Mentmore Sale May 20, 1977, lot 1061 and Sotheby's London December 12, 1985, lot 292; for the Duke of Norfolk's board see Simon Jervis, 'Furniture at Arundel Castle', *The Connoisseur* 197. 793 (March 1978), 203–16.
 5. Wilfried Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst: Kunstkammerspiele*, exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, 21 May–2 August 1998 (Milan: Skira, 1998), cat. 22–24, 76.
 6. Dieter Alfter, *Die Geschichte des Augsburger Kabinettschranks* (Augsburg: Historischer Verein für Schwaben, 1986), 28ff.
 7. For the history of the games for which these boards were suitable see Harold Murray, *A History of Board-games other than Chess* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1978), 72ff (draughts), 43ff (larger merels).
 8. It seems plausible that owners stored the counters or chessmen inside the lockable box formed by hinged boards, perhaps inside a cloth or leather bag to prevent accidental damage. One German chess board (about 1640) has a fitted drawer with recesses to receive the delicate turned and carved ivory pieces, suggesting a more considered approach to what may have been convenient custom (Victor Keats, *The Illustrated Guide to World Chess Sets* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1985), 68, pl. 18); another 17th-century German(?) ensemble employs a different design to keep games board and pieces together and consists of a stiff leather box with fitted compartments for the chess pieces, and a compartment for the separate

folding wood boards (Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 9).

9. For Hainhofer cabinets, see Barbara Mundt, 'Der Pommersche Kunstschränk', in Georg Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas - Furniture for European Kunstammer* (Munich: Kunstammer, 2008), 32–41, and Hellmuth Bethe, 'Das Hainhofer-Spielbrett in Hamburg und seine Verwandten', in *Festschrift für Erich Meyer zum 60. Geburtstag. 29 Oktober 1957: Studien zu Werken in den Sammlungen des Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg*, ed. by Erich Meyer and Werner Gramberg (Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1959), 183–90. When the cabinet sent by Hainhofer to Duke August of Brunswick-Lüneburg in 1631 arrived, most of the drawers and compartments were found to be empty, presumably as a result of theft, but a games board was probably housed in the space beneath a large drawer in the curved base (Renier Baarsen, *Duitse Meubelen German Furniture*, (Amsterdam: Zwolle, 1998), 32). The suitability of a games board to a cabinet was not however a new idea, as demonstrated by its inclusion in Gilles Corrozet's 'Le Blason Du Cabinet' (1539) – see Simon Jervis, 'Les Blasons Domestiques by Gilles Corrozet', *Furniture History* (1989): 5–35. The presence of similar games boards in English noble inventories indicates their wide geographical appeal: An 'Inventory of the plate, Household Stuff, Pictures & In Kenelworth Castle taken after the death of Robert, Earl of Leycester, 1588' lists 'A chess-borde of bone and ebanie, with thirtie and fower men to it, in a leather case' and 'A par of tabells of bone inlaid, with divers colors and men to them, in a case of leather'. (Cited in Angus Patterson, *Fashion and Armour in Renaissance Europe, Proud Lookes and Brave Attire* (London: V&A Publishing, 2009), 100, 106 (note 116)).
10. During the course of the present study over 20 comparable veneered games boards with engraved ivory or bone, attributable to southern Germany about 1580–1630 have been noted, and numerous others must be presumed to exist.
11. According to Dieter Alfter, the number of master cabinet-makers with their own workshops in Augsburg rose from 137 in 1558, to 200 in 1590 and 210 in 1598. Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas*, 42. For a general discussion of Augsburg ebony furniture, made from the early 1570s, see also Alfter, *Die Geschichte des Augsburger Kabinettschranks*, 28ff.
12. See Wolfram Koeppe, 'Spielbretter Aus der Sammlung Harbeson im Philadelphia Museum of Art', *Weltkunst* 22 (15 November 1992):

3366–8; Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas*, 42–57, and cat. 4, 82–3, 206–10; Winters et al, *A Renaissance Treasury*, 94–6; Bethe, ‘Das Hainhofer-Spielbrett in Hamburg und seine Verwandten’, 183ff.

13. For example, Georg Himmelheber, *Spiele. Gesellschaftsspiele aus einem Jahrtausend*, (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1972), cat. 45, writing about the board veneered with mother-of-pearl, brass, ivory, bone and horn, and inscribed FW in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, no. R201. Himmelheber does not provide specific information on the print sources used. On graphic sources for games boards and pieces see also Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, 259–68.
14. There is no standard term in English for this type of games board, with the following all having been used in print in recent years: games board, games boards, game board, games box, chess and tric-trac board, boxboards. (In the 16th and 17th centuries, ‘a pair of tables’ was the term generally used.) Similarly, in German, the term *Spielbrett* is often found alongside *Spielkassette* or *Spielkasten*. In considering whether the type under discussion is best characterised as a board or box, it is prudent not to take the purpose of richly decorated boxes (of whatever form) for granted, since Paula Nuttall has convincingly argued that one particular group of 15th-century boxes, traditionally understood ‘as gaming boxes, made to store and carry chess pieces, while serving as portable chessboards when they were turned over’, were intended primarily for an entirely different purpose (Paula Nuttall, ‘Dancing, Love and the “Beautiful Game”: A New Interpretation of a Group of Fifteenth Century ‘Gaming’ Boxes’, *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010): 119–41). Here the term ‘games board’ is used, on the basis that its function for the playing of games takes precedence over its use as a box with contents, that it serves more than one game, and that the two boards are not detachable.
15. On the Italian renaissance context see Patricia Simons, ‘(Check)Mating the Grand Masters: The Gendered, Sexualised Politics of Chess in Renaissance Italy’, *Oxford Art Journal* 16: 1 (1993): 59–74, and Nuttall, ‘Dancing, Love and the “Beautiful Game’.
16. The engraving by Jacob Matham comes from the series ‘The Consequences of Drunkenness’ (about 1621), with captions in Latin and Dutch that stress the risks of alcohol in encouraging both licentiousness and game playing: ‘Not only does alcohol bring an excess of unchaste behaviour, but against all benefits, it encourages

- games and gambling'. With thanks to Eloy Koldewej for the translation.
17. Robert C. Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 60–61, cited by Winters et al., *A Renaissance Treasury*, 96. For the activities of Augustus the Younger of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, see Hans and Barbara Holländer, *Schachpartie durch Zeiten und Welten, Katalog der Ausstellung im Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2005), 103, cited in Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas*, 210.
 18. During the 16th century Augsburg's Roman past (not shared by Nuremberg and Munich) was proudly celebrated. A particularly avid antiquarian was Conrad Peutinger, whose collection of ancient objects was on view in his private courtyard, and whose study and collection of ancient portrait medals was put to the service of Emperor Maximilian's propaganda (Gregory Jecmen, Freyda Spira, *Imperial Augsburg: Renaissance Prints and Drawings 1475–1540* (London: Lund Humphries, 2012), 28–32). Medallion heads also feature on the following boards: the Flagg collection, Winters et al, *A Renaissance Treasury.*, no. 40, which also depicts fables from Aesop; the Duke of Norfolk's collection, Simon Jervis, 'Furniture at Arundel Castle', 203–16; a board veneered with mother-of-pearl, brass, ivory, bone and horn, in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, (Georg Himmelheber, *Spiele. Gesellschaftsspiele aus einem Jahrtausend* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1972), cat. 45); the board sold at Sotheby's, London 31 October 2007, lot 155, from a private collection, East Anglia (UK), described as 'Engraved horn, fruitwood, inlaid, ebony games box, inscribed IOM and K. ARTUS; 36cm. high, 36cm. wide, 7cm deep'; Another, strikingly similar games board is described, without further reference, in Keats, *The Illustrated Guide to World Chess Sets*, 63. Such medallion heads do not tend to feature on games boards dateable after 1615, suggesting that they were regarded as old-fashioned.
 19. Dancing couples are also depicted on carved wood game counters thought to have been made in southern Germany during the second half of the 16th century (Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 94).
 20. See note 9 above, and Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

21. On the design of games pieces see above, Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst* (note 5) and Keats, *The Illustrated Guide to World Chess Sets* (note 8). Given the lack of silver on the V&A board under discussion it is perhaps more likely that the draughts counters used were made of plain turned ebony and ivory/bone, like those that survive with a 16th-century Spanish games board in the V&A's collection (no. 154-1900, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O134094/games-board-and-unknown/>).
22. The direct supply of ebony to Europe before 1600 was largely through Portuguese trade routes to the African coast and the East Indies. See Adam Bowett, *Woods in British furniture making 1400–1900: an illustrated historical dictionary* (Wetherby: Oblong Creative, 2012), 'Ebony', 69ff.
23. Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 104. The board is signed and dated by Hans Kels the Elder and follows designs from the workshop of Jörg Breus the Elder(?). Neither the commissioner nor the person responsible for the intellectual scheme of the design is known.
24. Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 114.
25. The chosen aesthetic excludes colour (which was technically possible as bone can be painted or dyed) in favour of monochromatic clarity and precise detail. Around 1600, the taste, particularly in England, for blackwork embroidery might be considered another artisanal response to the appeal of printed images, but it is not suggested here that there was influence between embroidery (which was also worked in other colour threads on a white support) and engraved bone.
26. On Augsburg's thriving and innovative print culture in the first half of the 16th century, see for example, Jecmen and Spira, *Imperial Augsburg*.
27. Another possibility, that the engraved games board was a reaction to silver shortages in Augsburg after the devaluation of its currency and the consequences of plague in 1627–8, does not seem to be supported by the stylistic dating. See Alfter, 'Marked Augsburg Furniture – A Warranty Seal for Provenance and Quality' in Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas*, 55.
28. See Hanns Ulrich Haedeke, trans. by Vivienne Menkes, *Metalwork* (London: Universe Books, 1970).
29. On the development of printed books of maps see Peter Barber, *Magnificent Maps: Power, Propaganda and Art* (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2010).

30. Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 90. The games board (about length 10.8 cm × width 8.9 cm × depth 2.5 cm), attributed to 16th-century Augsburg, was probably for travelling. The exterior 'book covers' are engraved for chess and merels, and bear inscriptions exhorting the owner to trust in God and remain upright (chess), and to trust that good luck will come (merels); inside are compartments for the games pieces (now missing) and a mirror.
31. See for example, Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 76–7.
32. See, for example, Smith, *The Body of the Artisan*, passim.
33. See, for example the boards attributed to the workshop of Ulrich Baumgartner, in Philadelphia Museum of Art, no. 64–91–17 (Koeppel, 'Spielbretter Aus der Sammlung Harbeson, 3366, figs 2–3), and in Laue, *Möbel für die Kunstkammern Europas*, cat. 4.
34. Dieter Beaujean, comp., Giulia Bartrum, ed., *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part VI* (2005 Ouderkerk Aan Den IJssel: Sound & Vision Publishers in co-operation with the Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 2004), nos. 335 Frieze with Six Busts, etching, height 2.9 cm × length 16.8 cm, and 331, Four Busts in Medallions, etching and engraving, height 3.4 cm × length 17 cm. Solis prints with classical busts were probably also used as the sources for a south German set of draughts pieces (about 1580) made of turned wood inset with engraved gold and silver discs (Seipel, *Spielwelten der Kunst*, cat. 81). For another use of Solis's print 331 (in New Holstein) on four 16th-century French carved oak doors in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (nos. 798–1895 and 799–1895) see Michael E. Bath, 'Sixteenth-Century Romaine Heads: Engravings by Virgil Solis Copied on Four Panels in the Victoria and Albert Museum', in *In Nocte Consilium. Studies in Emblematics in Honor of Pedro F. Campa*, ed. by John T. Cull and Peter M. Daly, Saecula Spiritalia 46 (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner Verlag, 2011).
35. Dieter Beaujean, comp., Giulia Bartrum, ed., *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part I* (2005 Ouderkerk Aan Den IJssel: Sound & Vision Publishers in co-operation with the Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 2004), xix.
36. On the Sotheby's 2007 board (see note 15) the hunting friezes are very similar in character to those by Solis but are not identical. The board also depicts four standing figures derived

- from prints of the Nine Worthies by Virgil Solis (Jane S. Peters, ed., *German Masters of the Sixteenth Century: Virgil Solis Intaglio Prints and Woodcuts, The Illustrated Bartsch 19, part 1*, (New York, Abaris Books, 1987), 36–8), and eight roundel male heads which are said in the sale catalogue entry to ‘derive from Solis’s designs’. The similarity in design and execution suggests that these engraved veneers were produced in the same workshop as those on the V&A board.
37. Beaujean, Bartrum, *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part VI*, nos. 498, 501, 505, 514, 531.
38. Beaujean, Bartrum, *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part VI*, nos. 987, 988, 992 (monkeys), 1029, 1030, 1031, 1033, 1035 (lions), 1016, 1019 and 1022 (parrots).
39. Ann Diels and Marjolein Leesberg, comps, Marjolein Leesberg and Arnout Balis, eds, *The New Hollstein The Collaert Dynasty part VI* (2005 Ouderkerk Aan Den IJssel: Sound & Vision Publishers in co-operation with the Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 2005), nos. 1600, 1602, 1604, 1606 and 1610. For discussion of Collaert’s debt to Solis, see xlv–xlvi.
40. Leesberg and Balis, *The New Hollstein The Collaert Dynasty part VI. Designs for Pendants II with Sea Monsters*, 1654–63. The prints used for the games board are: 1655, 1656, 1657, 1659, 1660, 1661, 1662 and 1663.
41. Ursula Mielke, comp., Holm Bevers and Christiane Wiebel, eds, *The New Hollstein German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts 1400–1700*, Heinrich Aldegrever (Rotterdam: Sound & Vision Interactive, 1998), no. 286, *Ornamental Design with Mask, Two Cornucopia of Fruit and Two Sphinxes Below*, 1552, height 14.5 cm × width 5.2 cm.
42. See Lambrecht Hopfer, ed. by R. A. Koch, *The Illustrated Bartsch 17* [VIII/iv] (New York: Abaris Books, 1981), for example 29 (531), *Ornament with Winged Horses*.
43. See, for example the prints by Sebald Beham (active in Nuremberg from 1519): Hollstein III, 141, 239 or Hollstein III, 134, 227, and Agostino Veneziano after Raphael or Giovanni da Udine, *Frieze with an Eros and a Siren* (Konrad Oberhuber, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch 27. The Works of Marcantonio Raimondi and of his School* (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 539 (386)).
44. Bevers and Wiebel, *The New Hollstein, Heinrich Aldegrever*, nos. 145, 149, (1538), 158, 159 (1551).
45. Keats, *The Illustrated Guide to World Chess Sets*, 51.

46. See Walter L. Strauss, ed. by Niklas Stoer, *The Illustrated Bartsch, German Masters of the Sixteenth Century*, 13 (New York: Abaris Books, 1984) for example 1302.045 e, f, g from the series ‘The Besiegers of Vienna’.
47. See for example Sebald Beham, R. A. Koch, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch, Early German Masters*, 16, VIII/ii (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 238 (218), 243 (220); Daniel Hopfer, R. A. Koch, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch, Early German Masters*, 17, VIII/iv, (New York: Abaris Books, 1981), 90 (495); Georg Pencz, R. A. Koch, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch, Early German Masters*, 16, VIII/iii, (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 124 (359).
48. Beaujean, Bartrum, *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part VI*, 817, or 908–9 (triangular designs). Precise sources have not been found (and were perhaps not necessary) for some of the commonly found ornament such as the various rosettes and quatrefoils, and the various narrow borders.
49. For discussion of this phenomenon in England, see Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).
50. Beaujean, Bartrum, *The New Hollstein Virgil Solis part I*, xx-xxii.
51. Bevers and Wiebel, *The New Hollstein, Heinrich Aldegrever*, 13. (See note 22).
52. Leesberg and Balis, *The New Hollstein The Collaert Dynasty part VI*, xliv-xlv.
53. Embroidered garments of the period provide one possible analogy in terms of the processes by which a complex design could be agreed between client, designer and craftsmen, in that they required effective collaboration between client, tailor, seamstress and embroiderer. See Susan North and Jenny Tiramani, eds, *Seventeenth-Century Women’s Dress Patterns, Book 1* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).
54. Goldsmiths work of the period may often be of a size where there is a possibility of 1:1 transfer between source print and the finished product, but in England at least, goldsmiths ‘succeeded in producing fashionable continental-style Mannerist objects without apparently making much use of actual prints’. (Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*, 201.) It is generally assumed that the ability to scale up a design accurately was a necessary part of every competent craftsman’s training. For the practice of scaling designs up and down by embroiderers see Susan North, ‘The Falkland Jacket: Sources, Provenance and Interpretation of an Emblematic

Artefact', *Emblematica* 14 (2005): 127–53, esp. 133–4.

55. I am grateful to Richard Sabin and Louise Tomsett of The Natural History Museum, London (Department of Zoology) who examined the board and identified the white veneers as bone, probably cattle or deer. 'The pale (almost white) colour of the inlays suggests that the bones used were degreased before working'. Similar corner bosses are found on the Philadelphia Museum of Art board, no. 64–91–6, Eger, 1670–90 (see Koeppe, 'Spielbretter Aus der Sammlung Harbeson', 3366–8, note 7). On the board sold at Sotheby's, London 31 October 2007, lot 155, (see note 15), raised, corner buttons (20 mm diameter), fulfil a similar function but

were apparently always plain, and are sawn flat.

56. For comparison, tailors provided embroiderers with marked, uncut fabric to be decorated (North and Tiramani, *Seventeenth-Century Women's Dress Patterns*, Book 1).

57. In terms of dimensions, a large proportion of the veneered games boards considered during the course of this study fall within the range of 38–42 cm (square or nearly square) when closed. The fairly standardised dimensions of many surviving games pieces also supports the idea that luxury games boards would tend, for the sake of convenience, to be produced to conventional dimensions.

‘Sawney’s Defence’: Anti-Catholicism, Consumption and Performance in 18th- Century Britain

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Abstract

This article examines an 18th-century English transfer-printed quart mug, printed with an image derived from a popular anti-Catholic satire from about 1779. The article

explores the relationship between object, image and audience, locating the mug within a nexus of Protestant masculine sociability that extended across the social hierarchy. Drawing upon existing forms of printed polemic, the mug shaped and was shaped by extra-Parliamentary political action, primarily in the form of toasting. This opened up possibilities for representation

beyond those embedded in print culture, bringing a crucial performative element to an otherwise fixed point of polemical reference.

Introduction

Despite the appealingly progressive narrative of ‘the Enlightenment’, the 18th century was not a period of homogenous religious toleration. In Protestant Britain, deist intellectuals such as Edward Gibbon and David Hume faced criticism and exclusion from university posts; while a fear of Catholic resurgence was still to be found outside the political elite, among the middling and poorer people, particularly in England.¹ An attempt by the ruling Whig party to emancipate Catholics from many legal restrictions, in 1778, caused a public uproar, and ultimately led to a riot in Edinburgh in February 1779, and the hugely

destructive Gordon Riots in London, in June 1780.²



Figure 1 – Quart mug, unknown maker, London or Liverpool, about 1779, transfer-printed creamware. Museum no. CIRC.70-1959. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The phenomenon of British anti-Catholicism was not purely sectarian or religiously informed, but intersected with questions of national identity, gender, class and consumption. In this article, I will use a ceramic mug in the collection of the V&A (fig. 1, CIRC.70-1959), as a lens through which to examine these questions, and their relationship to anti-Catholicism. In the first section,

I examine the materiality of the mug: its manufacture, likely use, dissemination and location in wider networks of ceramic consumption and print culture. Secondly, I offer a close reading of the image printed on the mug, and interpret this in the context of 18th-century discourses on masculinity, religion and nationalism. Finally, I use the findings of the close reading process to assert that this object is indicative of a shared Anglo-Scottish, Protestant, masculine attitude towards British identity, which was manifested through shared rituals, polite social networks and their

consumption of material goods. This attitude, and the object which represents it, crossed to some extent the divisions of class and social status, drawing upon older models of masculine sociability to bring together a demotic lexicon of anti-Catholic symbolism with bourgeois and elite male drinking rituals. In asserting this, I also claim that extra-parliamentary political participation was not merely augmented by the use of appropriately decorated objects, but that it was shaped by such usage; the objects themselves becoming ‘a tool as well as a site of discourse’.³

A transfer-printed quart mug: materiality and consumption

This ceramic is identifiable as a quart mug. Its dimensions (a diameter of 11 cm and height of 15.2 cm) suggest that it was designed to hold a 'Treasury quart', laid down by Act of Parliament in 1698 to standardise the retail of ale and beer.⁴ Other printed 18th-century mugs in the V&A's collection have similar dimensions, suggesting that this was a conventional shape and style.⁵ The likelihood that such mugs were used for the consumption of beer, rather than wine, spirits or hot 'soft' drinks, is further suggested by a comic poem published in 1776:

'Ode on the Breaking of a China Quart Mug Belonging to the Buttery of Lincoln College, Oxford'.⁶ The anonymous author appears to allude to beer as he describes 'how oft my Quart / Has sooth'd my care and warm'd my heart? / When barley lent its balmy aid / and all its liquid charms display'd! / When orange and the nut-brown toast / Swam mantling round the spicy coast!'. Barley, of course, is a key component in the brewing of beer.

Manufactured in creamware (a fine, light version of earthenware), it is transfer-printed with a scene taken from a satirical print published in 1779, and was itself probably produced around 1779–80 in order to capitalise on the events it references. It is possible that the printing, if not the firing of the ceramic, was done by the Liverpool firm of Sadler and Green, who pioneered the printing of satirical and sentimental images onto square tiles, as well as printing Wedgwood's early wares under contract.⁷ The print, titled 'Sawney's Defence Against the Beast, Pope, Whore, and Devil', depicts the allegorical forces

of Catholicism ranged in opposition to ‘Sawney’, a Scottish soldier in the British army (fig. 2).



Figure 2 – Sawney’s Defence Against the Beast, Pope, Whore and Devil, print, unknown artist, London, 1778, etching. Museum no. 1868,0808.4588.+ © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

The relationship between the print and ceramic industries in the later 18th century is not entirely clear. Landscape and generic sentimental scenes were often taken from drawing books issued for that purpose by publishers, such as that issued by the publisher John Bowles in November 1756; from which images appear on printed wares by Worcester, by Cockpit Hill (Derby), and on tiles by Sadler and Green.⁸ However, satirical images were not usually collated in this way. Books of satirical vignettes and caricature

were published with the amateur artist in mind, such as Mary Darly’s *A Book of Caricaturas*, from around 1762–3, but volumes of collected satires do not appear to have been distributed with the express purpose of providing material for professional copyists.⁹ It is difficult to establish whether those satirical images which were adapted for ceramic printing were selected on the basis of their sales figures, their aesthetic qualities, or their topical timeliness.

Also unclear is the issue of copyright and image ownership: were satirical prints reproduced with permission and encouragement, or were they simply copied or, as is the case with this object, adapted and simplified without reference to the print publisher? The visual differences between the original print on paper, and its iteration on this mug (which will be investigated later in this article), do suggest that such images were redesigned and re-engraved for the purposes of transfer printing onto ceramics, in part to adapt the scale of the two-dimensional print to the size and curvature of the mug.

Other mugs of this type also show simplification of the images on which they are based; for example, one in the V&A's collection, printed with a copy of 'Tythe in Kind, or the Sow's Revenge', eliminates the trees and other background details present on paper.¹⁰

Before analysing the image on the mug, and comparing it to the original print on paper, it is worth considering how transfer-printed ceramics were produced and distributed. Thinking about technique and dissemination is a useful strategy for understanding the significance of an object such as this, and goes some way toward answering questions such as: who would have bought this object? How might it have been displayed? How rare or common might it have been? Creamware, developed in the Staffordshire Potteries during the 1740s, became a popular material

for mid-range ceramics, thanks in no small part to its promotion by Josiah Wedgwood. More refined than earlier types of earthenware, but less expensive than porcelain, it was marketed as 'Queen's Ware' or 'pearl ware', making it an aspirational purchase for the middle-class home.¹¹

Transfer-printing, meanwhile, was likely a Birmingham or a Liverpool invention, for which several patents were applied during the 1750s.¹² It involved an engraved copper plate of the type used for printing on paper, which was coated in linseed oil and then wiped down, leaving just a trace of oil in the engraved grooves of the plate. The method probably used to produce this mug required a thin and flexible sheet of gelatin pressed onto the copperplate, which would pick up the lines of oil that formed the image. This sheet was then rolled onto the glazed surface of the ceramic to transfer the oil. Ground powder would then be lightly applied to the ceramic, sticking to the oil and making the image visible, before the surface was cleaned and fired to make the image stick.¹³

Such wares were popular and relatively cheap. Printed creamware punchbowls, for example, retailed for between two and five shillings – affordable to someone on a middling income above £100 per annum, but beyond the reach of a labourer or servant on £10–50 per annum.¹⁴ This is in line with the values of stolen china quart mugs cited in criminal proceedings of the wider period; china mugs were rarer in theft proceedings than their more valuable silver counterparts, but when referenced they are priced between four and five shillings.¹⁵ Other printed wares included plates, teapots and tiles, as

well as mugs, produced in Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Liverpool and London.¹⁶ They were functional and durable as well as decorative, and could be an attractive way for an individual to declare his or her beliefs and tastes to any visitor or friend when displayed in the home; although they did not constitute the most up-to-date, elite-led fashion in the manner of Wedgwood's neoclassical wares.¹⁷ In addition to the domestic interior, printed ceramic drinking vessels could be found in taverns and inns, allowing the proprietor to influence the conversation and custom of their establishment. Karen Harvey notes that printed

and painted punchbowls were frequently found in commercial inns and taverns; I argue that quart mugs, another common drinking vessel, would also have been found there in printed form.¹⁸

Between around 1770 and 1800, satirical prints were a popular source for such transfer-printed decoration, reflecting the concerns and cultural discourses of the day, as were portraits, fashionable landscapes, sentimental scenes and patriotic events and heroes.¹⁹ Before the development of transfer printing, other forms of political ceramics had been produced and sold throughout the 18th century – and earlier – with painted bowls and mugs manufactured to commemorate significant victories or movements. Admiral Vernon’s victory over the Spanish at Porto Bello, in 1739, prompted a flurry of polemical ceramics, as well as prints, bowls and medals.²⁰ Ditto the defeat of the 1745 Jacobite uprising, which

was similarly inflected with anti-Catholic prejudice.²¹ However, it was not until the expansion of transfer printing and the reproduction of satirical prints that new forms of interaction between audience, image and object became possible, as will become clear in the final section of this article.

Decorative ceramics were an important component of the 18th-century home. The purchase of small and decorative ceramics was perceived as the province of women, in their capacity as domestic managers and taste makers.²² The acquisition and display of such objects constituted part of the narrative of respectable politeness in the 18th century; that is to say, the refinement of an individual’s comportment and surroundings, without ostentation or excessive formality.²³ Decorative ceramics were intrinsically linked with the development of drinking cultures, predominantly feminine cultures situated around the tea table. As Harvey notes, these objects were ‘the kernel of a new set of social practices centred on non-

commercial sociability orchestrated by leisured women'.²⁴

The Sawney mug disrupts this narrative. Its rather crude iconography and political context prevents it from being treated as a straightforwardly decorative object, and its function as a vessel for holding beer or ale inscribes it as an object with masculine associations. This is not to suggest that consumption of beer was limited to men in this period, nor was the tavern or alehouse socially coded as the exclusive preserve of men.²⁵ And yet, 'certain ceramic objects, such as the smoking pipe, had strong associations with men', and it is possible that a politically inflected mug such as this was one such object.²⁶ The likelihood that this mug was used for the performance of political toasts is suggestive of male use. Toasting, which is discussed in the final section of this article in the context of anti-Catholicism, was a predominantly male ritual, performed in clubs, associations, and masculine

environments such as military or naval dinners.²⁷ While it is difficult to establish the gender of this object's purchaser with any certainty, its polemical and political imagery, and function related to these, implies masculine usage. As Matthew McCormack has argued, the concept of the independent man was a key component of political participation in this period, with the performance of politicised actions construed as a means of asserting masculinity.²⁸

As a vessel for the consumption of alcohol, potentially found within a public tavern or alehouse, the Sawney mug also connotes the possibility of drunkenness and its attendant dangers. While the ritualised consumption of alcohol was seen as a legitimate component of social interaction, actual drunkenness connoted impoliteness and an inability to control oneself – witness, for example, Lord Chesterfield's frequent imprecations against it in his *Letters to his Son*.²⁹ As Dana Rabin notes, the moral and social implications of drunkenness were stratified by class

in the 18th century, whereby the intoxication of the wealthy was seen as a private failure, but that of the poor was seen as a danger to the existing social order.³⁰ In light of this, we can regard the Sawney mug and its probable usage as existing on the threshold between acceptable, indeed necessary political performance, engendered by its imagery, and taboo loss of personal control and – by extension – independence, engendered by its function.

A mug and a message: nationalism, gender and social status

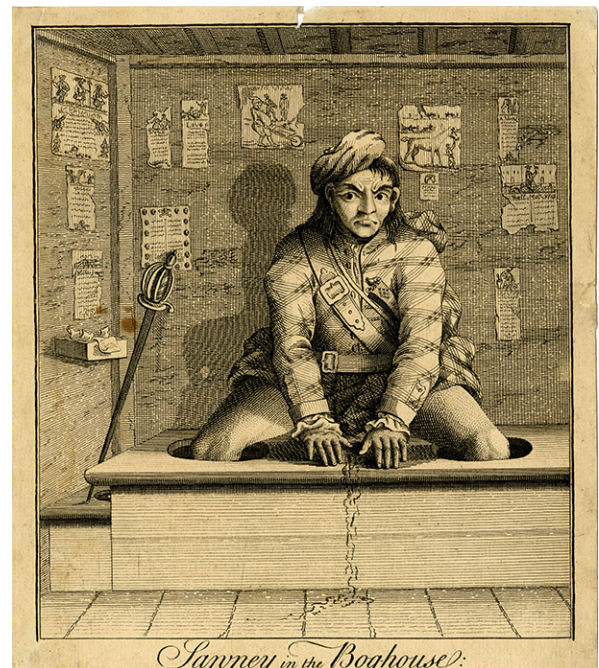


Figure 3 – Sawney in the Boghouse, print, unknown artist, London, 1745, etching. Museum no. 1858,0417.511. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

So, what of the imagery? The reproduction of the print on the mug can be read by following it counter-

clockwise around the exterior of the mug, mimicking the left-to-right orientation of the print itself. Following that orientation, we first come across Sawney, the Scots soldier, who is recognisable by his uniform coat and plaid kilt. The origin of ‘Sawney’ as a nickname for the stereotypical Scot has its roots in the legend of Sawney Bean.³¹ The development of Sawney as a tropic representation of the Scotsman in print culture slightly predates the appearance of John Bull, his English counterpart, first appearing in ‘Sawney in the Boghouse’ (1745, fig. 3).³² Before the publication of

‘Sawney’s Defence’, he was always presented in prints as a negative stereotype: boorish, violent and uncivilised. Here Sawney stands with his sword drawn in a defensive posture, holding in his other hand a pike from which the Union flag flies (fig. 4).

Sawney is positioned to the left of the River Tweed (demarcating the border between Scotland and England), and is approached by a figure in clerical bands, and a bishop. On the right-hand side of the river, the Pope in his three-tiered Papal tiara, and a man in a wig and ministerial sash, stand in conversation. The minister is not identified by name, but may perhaps represent the Earl of Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice (1756–88) and a noted public sympathiser to Catholic emancipation; alternatively, he may be Edward Thurlow, Lord Chancellor (1778–92) and another proponent of

official religious tolerance.³³ It is interesting to note that he wears a long wig in a style not fashionable since the early 1760s, and does not resemble any other politician involved in the passage of the Papists' Act of 1778, which would have released Catholics from their legal incapacity to own land, keep a school or join the Army.³⁴



Figure 4 – Detail of quart mug, unknown maker, London or Liverpool, about 1779, transfer-printed creamware. Museum no. CIRC.70-1959. © Danielle Thom/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

To the right again, a seven-headed allegorical beast is ridden by the Whore of Babylon – here, a fashionable woman in court dress – who tramples the figure of John Bull underfoot, symbolising the oppression which Englishmen would suffer under a liberated Catholic Church. The Whore of Babylon was an atavistic figure, her anti-Catholic connotations harking back to the 16th-century Reformation – most notably, the 1534 and 1545 editions of Martin Luther's vernacular German Bible which contained a woodcut depicting her riding the seven-headed beast and wearing a

papal tiara. She was briefly resurgent in English print culture around 1780, represented in anti-Catholic images such as that discussed here, and ‘The Whore of Babylon’s Caravan with a cargo of Popish Blessings’.³⁵ The beast and its rider are a direct reference to biblical passages in the Book of Revelations, which describes a beast with seven heads, ten horns and the feet of a bear.³⁶ The seven-headed beast is equated in Revelations with the Antichrist, which in early Protestant thought was considered the personification of the Catholic Church.³⁷ It can be interpreted as a reference to the Seven

Hills of Rome, as well the Hydra of Herculean legend, suggesting the pernicious and invincible nature of the papacy.³⁸

On the Sawney mug, she not only suggests the perceived immorality and corruption of the Church but, depicted as a woman of fashion and possibly a courtesan or prostitute, also underlines gender tensions of the period. With reference to the idea, persistent until the later 18th century, that women were inherently deceitful and, if left unchecked, prey to lustful urges, the Whore of Babylon stands proxy for female influence and sexual allure.³⁹ The lone female figure in an otherwise male-only scene, she plays on heterosexual male fears of luxury, effeminacy and moral degeneration, also associated with the Catholic Church. Indeed, the association between Catholicism and prostitution was a well-established one in 18th-century English visual culture, with prints celebrating the figures of the ‘nun’

and ‘abess’ as euphemisms for prostitutes and procuresses respectively.⁴⁰

Over the heads of all these figures, a winged devil flies in Sawney’s direction, clutching a crown. The message is explicit: Catholicism is equated with Satan, an evil practice rather than a simple confessional alternative to Protestantism, and threatens the Hanoverian succession of staunchly Protestant kings. Specifically, the image on this mug responds to the mooted extension of the Papists Act to Scotland, hence the focus on Sawney as the recipient of religious attentions.⁴¹ Considering this object in the broader context of 18th-century Anglo-Scottish relations, it marks the shift from an English view of Scotland as a hotbed of sedition and Jacobitism, to an integral part of Protestant Britain.⁴² Only three decades had passed since the Jacobite uprising of 1745, in which the Catholic Prince Charles Edward

Stuart, grandson of the deposed James II, had led Scottish troops in an attempt to restore the Stuart line to the British throne.⁴³ It was only ten years since the radical politician John Wilkes had used recent memories of Jacobite rebellion to foment opposition against the Scottish politician Lord Bute, with popular prints of the day using the character of Sawney as a thuggish and uncivilised symbol of Scottishness.⁴⁴

Here, then, the positive representation of Sawney as a Protestant figure – his aggression channelled legitimately into the British Army – indicates a significant change in English views of Scotland and Scottishness from the 1770s onwards. This change did not constitute an English acceptance of Scottish difference, but rather the co-existence of Scottishness alongside the wider entity that was Britain; its culture and distinct traditions eventually being diluted into a romantic and picturesque narrative.⁴⁵ What is also noteworthy about Sawney, aside from his Scottishness, is his class status. He

was presented as an impoverished figure, as in ‘Sawney in the Boghouse’, initially as a means of alluding to the poverty and poor farming conditions of the Scottish Highlands; but on this mug he transcends these limitations to become a kind of Protestant folk hero, in contrast to his earlier, Catholic connotations. While his status as a private soldier does not permit him to escape his lower-class identity, it does enable him to inhabit a kind of patriotic Britishness alongside his Scottish roots.⁴⁶ The development of Highland dress, in the later 18th century, as an elite symbol of martial and

cultural allegiance to Britain may have influenced this shift.⁴⁷ This intersection of religion, class and nationality is crucial to understanding the significance of this image located on a drinking vessel, as opposed to the original print from which it was derived.

A comparison of the mug with a surviving copy of the print on which it is based reveals noticeable differences, indicating that the image has been simplified for the purposes of transfer to the smaller, three-dimensional ceramic surface. The Whore of Babylon, for example, appears in a less elaborate dress and hairstyle here, compared to the print. Many of the captions indicating speech have been removed, leaving only those few that transmit the essential message of the image. Indeed, the title of the print does not appear on the mug itself, implying that those who used

or viewed it must have been familiar with the print if they were to fully engage with the mug's message.

While the reason for this simplification was almost certainly practical, as it would have been less labour intensive and minimised the possibility of smudging and wobbling during the transfer process, it does demarcate the mug as distinct from the print, with a separate-but-related set of functions and interpretive possibilities. It is entirely possible that the owner(s) of this mug would have been familiar with the print, perhaps even owning both or being spurred to purchase one by seeing the other; but the mug opens up possibilities of performance and ritual that the print does not. It is also worth remembering that the probable price of the mug, at two to five shillings, puts it in a higher bracket of consumption than the print, the average retail price of which was 6d.⁴⁸ Prints were designed to be looked at – on a wall, in a portfolio or as single sheets – whereas drinking

vessels such as this quart mug were designed to be used and handled; their physical function informing their didactic possibilities. The print would have enjoyed a wider distribution and dissemination – in addition to its more accessible price, it would have had a potential print run in the region of 2,000–3,000 copies before the copper plate needed to be re-engraved from wearing.⁴⁹ However, its relatively static mode of display and consumption would have prevented it from encompassing the range of performative possibilities encoded in the mug.



Figure 5 – Interior detail of quart mug, unknown maker, London or Liverpool, about 1779, transfer-printed creamware. Museum no. CIRC.70-1959. © Danielle Thom/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The interior motif on this mug – a floral wreath enclosing the

monogram 'DD' – is unusual, in that it has been printed (fig. 5). While personalised initials, names or inscriptions are common on 18th-century creamware, they were virtually always painted individually, as is the case with two Lowestoft porcelain mugs in the collection of the British Museum, both about 1780, painted with 'Rob't Haward' and 'Sarah Smy' respectively.⁵⁰ The employment of printing here suggests that multiples were made with this same motif, since the production of a copperplate for a single printed monogram would have been wasteful and

expensive.⁵¹ The presence of (painted) initials would usually suggest that an object had been personal property, and was therefore used in a domestic context. Here, however, the probable duplication of the initials opens up the possibility that this mug was part of a set commissioned for a commercial inn, or possibly a club, society or other association that met for the purposes of conversation, affinity and ritual. Both were environments in which masculine toasting was expected, and which coalesced around or promoted a particular political stance.

Clubs, in particular, flourished in the 1770s after steadily growing in numbers throughout the preceding century.⁵² While no other multiples of this mug have been found to definitively prove that it was part of a set, it is reasonable to posit that 'DD' might stand for the name of a landlord, a club, or a patron. Indeed, it may represent the continuance of a 'mug club', the like of which flourished in the 1710s, in which 'each member had his own mug for loyal toasts [...] as well as political and drinking songs. Principally concerned to support the Hanoverian settlement, the mug-house clubs

launched fierce attacks on their Tory and Jacobite opponents'.⁵³ The anti-Catholic theme of Sawney's Defence would certainly suit a club whose ideological basis was a shared opposition to Tory politics and Jacobite incursion, with its implications of tyrannical, absolutist rule and undermining of English, Protestant liberty. Another possible source for this object might be one of the many radical Wilkesite clubs which had existed since the 1760s, formed in support of the populist MP John Wilkes and his inflammatory anti-Catholic, anti-Scots rhetoric.⁵⁴

Loyal toasts and political performance

The mug's iconography is related to its use, and vice versa, as one shapes the other. The political and religious context of the image would have shaped the social aspect of drinking, particularly in the context of toasting, which was a codified way of publicly expressing beliefs and loyalties. Just as the consumption and display of ceramic objects could act as a confirmation of one's politics, so too could the uses towards which those objects were put, particularly in a public or semi-public social environment. Toasting was a longstanding ritual inflected by gender and class – predominantly masculine, its significance could be determined not only by the verbal content of the toast, but also the vessels used. As Angela McShane has established, the performance of

loyal toasting became enmeshed with Protestant ritual in the later 17th and early 18th centuries, with the act of toasting being regarded as almost akin to the communion sacrament. As a result, in material culture terms there was a high degree of interchangeability between the vessels used for each mode of drinking, as Protestant theologians sought to reframe communion as distinct from the Catholic sacrament with its ornate chalices.⁵⁵

In this light, we can view the Sawney mug as a kind of quasi-sacred vessel: its overt anti-Catholic imagery reinforcing any loyal Protestant toast with which it was performed. It is not unreasonable to posit that the mug would have been used to perform loyal toasts (that is to say, toasts to the King, particularly in his capacity as head of the Church of England, and to Britain). Precedents exist for matching drinking vessels to specific toasts, such as the boot-shaped glasses in the collection of the [British Museum](#), which were used to drink damnation to the unpopular Lord Bute; the boot a

verbal and visual pun on both his name and his physique.⁵⁶

Beer, which was served in quart mugs such as the one examined here, was an inexpensive drink, served in alehouses and consumed predominantly by working people.⁵⁷ It was celebrated as such by William Hogarth in his 1751 etching, 'Beer Street'. It also had patriotic connotations, brewed locally rather than imported – unlike wine, which could connote political sympathy for the importing nation, with Catholics and Jacobite sympathisers tending to consume smuggled French claret.⁵⁸ Thinking about the status implications of beer, and its relationship to a conception of British identity, it is possible to understand how the type of ritual drinking associated with the Sawney mug elided certain social distinctions. While beer had plebeian associations, its consumption was not necessarily incompatible with bourgeois or elite manliness, particularly as this period saw a 'resurgence of older styles of

masculinity as politeness waned at the end of the 18th century'.⁵⁹

The possibilities that the Sawney mug was used in a gentlemanly club context, and that it represented a special commission, also point to it having been used and understood in an environment which referenced the bourgeois public sphere without fully mapping onto it. As Mark Knights points out, printed polemic (of which, I argue below, this mug constitutes an example) developed in the 18th century as a form of debate which 'exposed the irrationality and abusive nature of a good deal of public discourse'.⁶⁰ That is to say, while the material and social contexts of loyal toasting were derived from 18th-century politeness – ceramics collecting, gentlemanly club society, Anglican ritual – the actual performance of toasting also drew heavily on older, more demotic and abusive tropes and values – the Whore of Babylon, the acceptance of potential drunkenness – in a way which did not adhere to the Habermasian conception of rational-critical discourse underpinning the

development of public political debate.⁶¹

McShane notes that social drinking, particularly toasting, was defined by ‘contrarities of good fellowship and violence’, indicating the fluid nature of the act and the capacity for it to be situated in a broad range of social contexts.⁶²

Returning to the idea that the Sawney mug constitutes an example of ‘printed polemic’, it is clear that the interaction of printed image and three-dimensional, functional object produced a discursive tool which shaped polemical debate, in addition to representing a fixed polemical message. Lifting the printed image off the page and locating it, in manipulated form, on the mug, gave it greater flexibility, and broadened the potential range of viewer-responses. The ‘mugness’ of the mug – its shape, function, commodity

status – allowed the images borne on its surfaces to take on narrative qualities that informed its uses. Thus, these images took on an essentially fictitious nature, the mug presenting ‘a world of imagination and invention’ which used a nexus of historic tropes and contemporary references to ‘spread fears about phenomena that were apparent or even imagined’.⁶³ The exaggerated and grotesque nature of anti-Catholic polemic, represented visually on this mug and more broadly in print between 1778–80, cohered with the violence and fear manifested in public reactions to emancipation.⁶⁴ It is fitting, then, that the mug acted as a site on which polemic and social reaction could meet.

The mug and its uses support a narrative of masculine British loyalty informed by both polite social interaction and older forms of ritual. It is not clear whether the owner, whoever they were, might have been English or Scottish – there was an active consuming class in polite Lowland Scots society, and the subject matter certainly pertained

to Scottish interests, given the violent response to Catholic emancipation in Edinburgh.⁶⁵ The use of Sawney, however, with his pejorative history and anti-Scottish associations, is suggestive of an English market, as is the mug's probable place of production. Whoever the owner might have been, their possession of this ceramic is indicative of a desire on their part to own and use objects as a means of giving form and visibility to their affiliations and identity. Judging by the usual price of objects such as this one, its possessor will have been economically comfortable (either as an individual or as a business owner), with

enough disposable income to spend the equivalent of a labourer's daily wage on a decorative drinking vessel – and, perhaps, to spend more if purchasing multiples of this mug as a set.

Conclusion

The Sawney mug embodies many of the key developments in political visual culture which took place during the 18th century: the increasing importance of polemic; commercial intervention; wider dissemination of images; and the growth of the club as a venue for political debate and performance. At the same time, it has atavistic connotations, demonstrating the persistence of older types of image-making, and the resurgence of older types of sociability and masculinity. The mug represents, therefore, the various tensions that characterised

the formation of the 18th-century middle class, in which the imperatives of feminised fashion and polite consumption competed with the masculine desire for patriotic independence and traditional modes of socialisation. It highlights the question of Scottish culture and identity in relation to England, and calls into question the longstanding status of Scotland as an enemy 'other', marking the shift from separate English and Scottish identities to a united Britishness.

Thinking about the ways in which this object may have been consumed, owned, used and viewed, it is

apparent that the performance of politics, in its broadest extra-Parliamentary sense, formed and was formed by material objects designed with this performance in mind. In this respect, 'Sawney's Defence' does not only comment upon anti-Catholic sentiment in 1770s Britain, but also contributes to it, its probable use as a vessel for toasting and shared social drinking making it part of an ongoing conversation between a socially broad range of groups and persons.

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A Weft-Beater from Niya: Making a Case for the Local Production of Carpets in Ancient Cadhotā (2nd to mid- 4th century CE)

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Abstract

Third to fourth-century texts from the abandoned Silk Road oasis of Niya contain references to valuable carpets that were traded for vineyards and slaves. By focusing on a wooden weaving implement, this discussion explores the social,

cultural and economic connections between the carpets in these documents and the ancient textile fragments now in the Stein Loan Collection at the V&A and British Museum.

Introduction

In October 1906, an undecorated wooden comb-like implement was rediscovered by the celebrated explorer-archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943) during the second of his three landmark Central Asian expeditions.¹ For the object, this event marked the start of an arduous journey beginning in the present day Xinjiang Uyghur

Autonomous Region of China (fig. 1) and ending halfway around the world in London; ‘a total journey of some 8,000 miles, including transport through high mountain ranges and across glacier passes, on camels, yaks, and ponies, and subsequent travel by cart, rail, and steamer’.² Currently held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, this artifact was first introduced to me in 2012 by Helen Persson, the V&A curator responsible for the Stein Loan Collection. As a practitioner of weaving, I had been interested in studying this wooden implement, which was believed to have functioned as a weaving tool (fig. 2). The following discussion focuses on this tool and explores its multiple meanings in the society and culture of a 2nd to 4th-century oasis settlement, which had served as an important stop along the southern arm of the Silk Road.

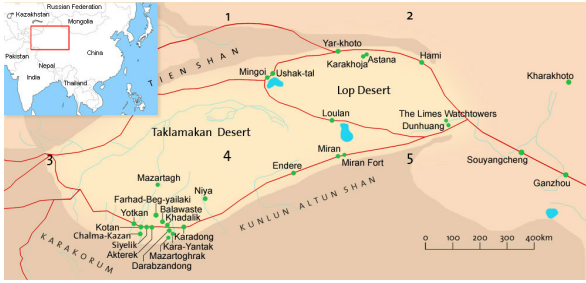


Figure 1 – Detailed map showing the areas explored by Sir Aurel Stein



Figure 2 – Weft beater, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 100–350 CE, carved wood. Museum no. LOAN.STEIN.530. © Swati Venkat/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

This seemingly ordinary object has played its part in a remarkable story of the international race to exploit an uncharted archaeological goldmine in a desolate backwater of China and, thereby, recover a forgotten

chapter of history. In the 20th century, Xinjiang attracted foreign explorers and archaeologists, propelled by intellectual hunger and professional rivalry, and backed by competing world superpowers. There was a story marked both by pioneering discovery and shocking destruction.³ Since then, the Chinese have vigorously laid claim to their stolen heritage, today scattered amongst numerous foreign collections, while also adding their own considerable efforts and scholarship towards expanding our present knowledge of this material. But what remains of this heritage in China has turned out to be no less contentious, considering the implications it has had for competing ethnic and political claims in an ongoing separatist conflict.

The rich harvest of artifacts unearthed and brought back by Stein from this region between 1900 and 1916 included murals, sculptures, coins, documents, textiles, pottery, furniture and miscellaneous implements from numerous sites and spanning a wide swath of the region's history.

Most of this material was eventually divided up between his two main sponsors: the British Museum and the Government of India. Of the latter corpus, some 700 (primarily) textile objects from the second and third expeditions now at the V&A, were formally received by the Museum on loan from the Government of India and the Archaeological Survey of India during the 1920s and 1930s.

This arrangement was made possible largely because of the initiative of two prominent members of the V&A's Department of Textiles, who were interested in these specimens 'as early exemplars of complex weaving techniques'.⁴ Most notable among these advocates of the Stein textiles was A. F. Kendrick

(V&A Keeper of Textiles 1897-1924) who was especially keen that this material be made available for scholarly investigation 'at no very distant date'.⁵ Encompassing material ranging in date from 200 BCE to 1200 CE ⁶, the V&A's Stein holdings undoubtedly offer a unique opportunity for tracing the development of textiles through this period. The Museum's early outlook has led to the development of a substantial body of scholarship around the collection, as informed by related collections in other institutions, albeit with a predominantly technical focus.⁷ Notable contributions from within the V&A include works by Donald King, Verity Wilson and Helen Persson, while externally Krishna Riboud, Anna Muthesius, Zhao Feng and Helen Wang have published studies that also attend to materials from the Stein Loan Collection.⁸

The immense technical and art historical value of ancient silks unearthed in this region is abundantly evident, but this material is also important because of what it has revealed about the larger

dynamics of trade, diplomacy, technology and the religio-cultural processes that shaped these features over a significant span of time. Most notably, work such as that of Elizabeth Wayland Barber has firmly demonstrated the considerable potential of wool textiles from Xinjiang as a rich source of information in addressing key questions of historical interest.⁹ This essay aims to go some way towards extending that line of research, responding to the V&A's growing interest in moving beyond a technical approach towards exploiting the Stein Loan Collection textiles as 'a valuable

resource for [...] economic, social and ethnographical studies'.¹⁰

While it is undoubtedly rewarding to investigate the textiles themselves, much more might be revealed through the study of the actual tools used to produce them. As Persson has observed, 'finds of wooden weft beaters linked with pile making or tapestry weaving undoubtedly show that these types of textiles were produced locally'.¹¹ This study begins by probing that connection in some depth: by investigating whether the wooden comb-like object in the V&A's Stein Loan Collection might have been used to produce pile textiles such as the extant specimens discussed here. I then consider these findings in relation to the evidence provided by contemporary documents in order to ascertain their significance. I shall draw mainly upon material from the site that Stein referred to as 'Niya' (2nd to mid-4th century CE, fig. 1), working primarily with Stein artifacts at the V&A and the British Museum.

Niya has yielded a substantial body of written documents besides human remains and artifacts, offering the rare opportunity to assemble a richly detailed picture of a Silk Road oasis during the early centuries of the Common Era. By grounding my research in this local historical context, I adopt textiles as a lens through which a new dimension can be brought to our knowledge of life in ancient Niya. This investigation has benefited from a well-developed pool of Silk Road scholarship, limited in this instance to English language sources.

‘Implements of home industry’¹²

One of the non-textile items in the V&A’s Stein Loan Collection is a plain, comb-like wooden object (LOAN.STEIN.530, fig. 2) from the archaeological site of Niya.¹³ Wedge-shaped in profile, it has a solid body provided with short, blunt teeth at one end and topped off with an elongated knob at the other. The thick body tapers down to a curved edge bearing eleven short teeth and a stump at one extreme indicating where the twelfth would have been. Measuring 9 cm wide and 24.2 cm long, this object has been carved out of a single piece of wood which is probably that of one of the poplar varieties native to the region.¹⁴



Figure 3 – Comb beater, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 3rd century CE, carved wood. Museum no. 1907,1111.97. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London



Figure 4 – Comb beater, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 3rd century CE, carved wood. Museum no. MAS.554. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

Three comparable objects from the British Museum’s Stein holdings – 1907,1111.97 (fig. 3), MAS.554 (fig. 4) and MAS.727 (fig. 5) – are all dated to approximately the same period as the V&A piece.¹⁵ The former two are from Niya and the third is from Loulan L. B., a roughly contemporaneous site situated at the eastern extreme of the ancient kingdom of Kroraina to which the settlement at Niya belonged during the latter part of its occupation (fig. 1). These specimens represent a range of sizes for what is essentially the same object type, showing variations primarily in the number of teeth and the spaces between

them.¹⁶ Even the largest can be held comfortably in an adult hand, although it quickly becomes clear that the knob was not meant to serve as handle. In all four cases, the knob is too small to allow sufficient grip and its neck is too slender to offer leverage on the bulky body of the implement.



Figure 5 – Comb beater, unknown maker, excavated from Loulan, China, 3rd century CE, carved wood. Museum no. MAS.727. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

Stein seems to have briefly entertained the idea that this kind of object was a currycomb used for grooming horses before eventually concluding that it was a weft-beater employed in weaving carpets or tapestry.¹⁷ While the latter theory has since been generally accepted, this essay begins by seeking definite evidence in order to conclusively confirm it before proceeding to

consider the context of the object's use.

A brief overview of the mechanics of weaving offers a useful starting point for a close reading of the object. Any kind of weaving requires two sets of elements, normally yarns. The first is a set of parallel yarns known as the warp and this usually remains fixed and under tension. The second set of yarns, the weft, is introduced one at a time and perpendicular to the warp direction resulting in an interlaced surface. To incorporate the weft into the warp, the warp is divided into two layers between which the weft is then sandwiched. Next, the layers of warp are interchanged, bringing the formerly lower layer to the top in order to lock in the first weft while simultaneously creating a space for receiving the succeeding weft.

Repetition of this process produces the simplest sort of woven fabric.

Each time a weft is introduced, it must be packed down with the preceding wefts to create a compact, even surface. This function is performed by an implement known as the 'beater'

which especially in the weaving of rugs, carpets and tapestry usually takes the form of a toothed handheld tool, allowing the weaver to attend to small sections of the weft (or knots) at a time. Its teeth fit between the unwoven warps and the beater is pulled (or pushed downwards/sideways, depending on the arrangement of the loom and the weaver's position relative to it) with sharp strokes towards the newly inserted wefts in order to force them closer to one another and create a densely woven surface.



Figure 6 – Weft beater, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 100–350 CE, carved wood. Museum no. LOAN.STEIN.530. © Swati Venkat/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Described by textile expert and master weaver Peter Collingwood as 'extreme textiles', rugs are designed to endure rough use.¹⁸ Accordingly,

the procedure used to produce them generally involves some extreme treatment. Ideally, although not always in practice, the warp for weaving a rug should be maintained under high tension and the weft must be 'beaten' down thoroughly. The function of the beater is well accomplished when it is heavy and sturdy enough to allow the weaver to create the requisite momentum without causing or sustaining damage.

On that score, the four wooden objects considered here would appear to fit the bill. The provision of a large, solid wooden body for the necessary impact is one expected feature, although, on account of the

desiccation that these objects have no doubt suffered, it is only MAS.554, the largest, which feels suitably heavy when lifted. If such an object were indeed a currycomb, the provision of so substantial a body for a task primarily performed by the teeth would be hard to justify. In the case of the weft-beater, on the other hand, body and teeth are both equally crucial to accomplishing the task effectively.¹⁹



Figure 7 – Weft beater, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 100–350 CE, carved wood. Museum no. LOAN.STEIN.530. © Swati Venkat/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The most satisfactory evidence in support of the weft-beater theory is to be found in the ample spaces between the teeth of the V&A specimen. A number of even black spots arranged in a roughly linear fashion are clearly visible in the

‘valleys’ between the teeth: on average three between each pair of teeth (fig. 6). The regularity in spacing and size of these black spots indicates that the causative agents were accordingly regularly spaced and uniformly sized, much as warp yarns would have been. The spots in the central valleys are clearer than those in the outer ones, being completely absent at the extremes. Taking into account the curvature in the toothed edge of the tool, this feature suggests that the causative agents were arranged more or less along a single plane (as we might expect warp yarns to have been) such

that the central valleys would have come closest into contact with them and, thereby, suffered a higher degree of abrasion. The same abrasion produced long, dark striations along the sides of the teeth (fig. 7), indicating that the causative agents were linear in form, lay along a common plane and were roughly perpendicular to the plane of the object itself. This is consistent with the position warp yarns normally occupy relative to the teeth of a beater. Thus, we may take these marks of use as substantial proof of the object’s career as weft-beater.

However, several questions still remain. Had this tool been employed on multiple occasions to weave different kinds of fabrics with warp yarns of varying thickness spaced differently each time, it is remarkable that the spots should remain so clearly defined. Are we then to assume that the beater was used just once? Or was it used on multiple occasions, but to weave cloth of the same quality each time?²⁰ There also remains the question of the curvature to the toothed edge, as seen in three of the four weft-beaters.²¹ This feature appears intentional but it is not clear what advantage,

if any, it might have afforded.²²

The knob's primary purpose seems to have been to support the angle between the weaver's thumb and index finger while they held its body firmly along both flat faces (see fig. 2).²³ Such a grip would facilitate the requisite wrist movement in beating the weft, particularly as expected on a horizontal loom.²⁴ This observation can only have limited value, as I have observed that experienced weavers are often accustomed to using tools, whose design would not immediately seem ideal in terms of ergonomics. Therefore, any inference as to the configuration of the loom based solely on an ergonomic assessment of the weft-beater could prove misleading. Further, as the specialist on prehistoric textiles and weaving Elizabeth Wayland Barber has remarked, 'since looms are merely clever aggregates of plain sticks, they are seldom identifiable in the archaeological record'.²⁵ Yet, as her own work has demonstrated, 'reading' surviving textile fragments

can provide insights into looms and how weavers might have worked.

‘Pile’ usually consists of yarn tufts, loops or bunches of fibres introduced into the structure of a fabric in such a way as to protrude prominently outward from the flat surface of the textile, creating a raised surface as in a knotted carpet. The presence of pile on both surfaces of some textile fragments from Krorainic sites suggests that such fabrics were woven on upright looms which would have allowed comfortable access to what would otherwise be the ‘underside’ of the warp. Such a setup may have been worked either by solitary weavers or by pairs of them attending to the front and back simultaneously to create pile on both surfaces of the textile. It is possible that the ‘tufts’ on the reverse of knotted pile pieces were inserted individually as pre-cut lengths of yarn, in which case it is not inconceivable that a horizontal loom may have been employed. However, the arrangement of these tufts on some pieces recalls a

pattern consistent with that produced by the cut-loop pile technique, suggesting that this rather more efficient method was known. The cut-loop pile technique appears to have been employed in producing pile not only on the face of certain pieces but also on the reverse of some knotted pile fragments. The latter fact again implies the use of an upright loom. Yet, textiles with pile only on one surface, whether composed of knots or cut loops, could well have been woven on a horizontal loom arrangement. Thus, it is possible that more than one type of rug loom was in use in ancient Niya. Fortunately, some specimens of carpets have survived largely intact and these can offer a sense of the width of the looms used to produce them. This aspect is considered in greater detail further on in the essay.

Evidence from

surviving Krorainic textiles

The weaving of carpets or tapestry rarely calls for loom technology capable of producing anything more complex than tabby or twill constructions, making it difficult to state with absolute certainty what sort of loom the V&A beater was used with. However, surviving textiles can help ascertain the range of products it was possible to weave using a weft-beater like the V&A's example.

Textiles recovered from Krorainic sites represent an exciting array of patterns, materials, structures, textures and qualities. The well-known resist-dyed cotton textile found at Niya probably came from west Asia or India.²⁶ Fine, figured silks found at Niya and Loulan, particularly a spectacular group bearing auspicious woven inscriptions, have unanimously been

attributed to China. This is hardly surprising considering the strategic location of Kroraina. While it is unclear whether the entire spectrum of colours in some woollen taqueté, tapestry and carpet fragments would have been locally dyed,²⁷ we can be fairly certain that the ubiquitous felts and woven wools of coarse to medium quality were products of local manufacture and constituted the functional class of textiles used and produced by the general populace, if not the more affluent sections of society as well.²⁸

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim-monk Faxian, travelling through Kroraina (or 'Shan-shan' as he knew it) in around 400 CE, observed that 'the clothes of the common people are coarse [...] some wearing felt and others coarse serge or cloth of hair'.²⁹ Written records from Niya also reveal that the population kept sheep, goats, horses and camels, with the discovery of spinning tools and hanks of yarn at Niya strengthening the case for the local production of textiles from wool and other fibres.

The present discussion is limited to woven textiles, but even within this category apparently ‘indigenous’ fabrics are made from a variety of plant and animal material, and display considerable diversity. Examples survive of multiple variants of the tabby (such as balanced, weft-faced, ribbed and basket weaves), taqueté, twills, tapestry techniques, diverse pile structures and even twining. Significantly, some of these could certainly have been woven using beaters such as those discussed above.



Figure 8 – Textile or carpet, unknown maker, excavated from Niya, China, 200-400 CE, knotted wool. Museum no. MAS.540.a-c. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London



Figure 9 – Textile or carpet, unknown maker, excavated from Loulan, China, 200–400 CE, woven and knotted wool. Museum no. MAS.693. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London

Returning to the marks on the V&A’s weft-beater, although it is difficult to arrive at an accurate figure, the spots appear to be arranged about five or six to the centimetre, with each measuring less than a millimetre across on average. This gives a rough sense of warp yarn count (fineness) and distribution (expressed henceforth in terms of ‘warp ends per cm’). These findings can be compared with the specifications of surviving textiles using information gathered from the British Museum’s catalogue entries, Vivi Sylwan’s notes on textiles unearthed by the Sino-Swedish

expedition, Wu Min's study of specimens from Krourainic sites and thorough examination of pieces in the Stein Loan Collection. Since this tool would have been better suited to carpet weaving, it makes sense to focus on heavier fabrics, like pile textiles, and eliminate lighter and finer specimens, which would have been unable to withstand the beater's impact.³⁰



Figure 10 – Carpet fragment, unknown maker, excavated from Loulan, China, 200–400 CE, knotted wool on tapestry weave. Museum no. LOAN.STEIN.534. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

An example of pile-woven textile from Niya (MAS.540.a-c, fig. 8) has about 8 warp ends per cm,³¹ whereas one from Loulan (MAS.693, fig. 9), found by Stein in a refuse heap, is relatively coarse with 3 warp ends per cm.³² Even allowing for the distortions in textile structure that these specimens must have developed over the centuries, we already have a range within which the beater's marks may be comfortably situated. Three pieces from the Loulan area come even closer. One, now at the V&A, is a

coarse rug fragment showing an interesting combination of pile with tapestry ground that resembles taqueté on the flat side (LOAN.STEIN.534, fig. 10).³³ This specimen has coarse warps arranged at roughly 4.5 warp ends per cm. Next is a group of fragments of a pile carpet, numbered 34:76-79, recovered from a gravesite; Sylwan tells us that these are composed of warps 2 to 2.5 mm thick arranged between 5.4 to 5.8 warp ends to the cm.³⁴ This group apparently displays a distinctive ‘latch-hook’ pattern similar to another colourful carpet fragment (LOAN.STEIN.647, fig. 11),

also recovered from a gravesite and now at the V&A, which has about 6.5 warp ends per cm.³⁵

Of the seven pile textiles surveyed by Wu Min, four in particular show features consistent with the pattern we are seeking. 89BYYM1:12 from Yingpan is a nearly complete carpet with the figure of a lion occupying the field. Each warp yarn measures 2 mm in diameter and these are arranged at 5 warp ends per cm. A rhombus-patterned fragment from Niya, 59MNM1:52(a) has warps measuring 1.5 to 2 mm in diameter and arranged at 4 warp ends per cm. Another rhombus-patterned fragment from Niya, 59MNM:52(b) comes closer to the mark with warp yarns measuring 1.8 to 2 mm in diameter and distributed at 5 warp ends per cm. A pile fragment recovered from grave B2 at Gutai (in the Loulan area) and numbered 80LBMB2:92 has warps 1.3 to 1.5 mm thick and arranged at between 6 and 7 warp ends per cm.³⁶ Finally, an intact carpet, M3:28, recovered from a burial at Niya (where it had

originally been used to wrap the corpse) is composed of warps arranged at 5 warp ends per cm.³⁷



Figure 11. Carpet fragment, unknown maker, excavated from Loulan, China, 150–60 CE, knotted wool on wool warp and weft. Museum no. LOAN.STEIN.647. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

This limited survey serves to reinforce the theory that carpets and other pile textiles were produced in Niya (and possibly

Loulan) using weft-beaters like the V&A's.³⁸ Some of the textiles considered here were recovered from cemeteries, indicating that they may have been woven well before the date ascribed to the V&A's beater. For instance, the specimen LOAN.STEIN.647 (fig. 11) has been radiocarbon dated to between 150 BCE and 60 CE.³⁹ Does this mean that the quality of carpet weaving in the region changed very little over the space of a few centuries? The evidence here is too scanty to permit such a conclusion but, considering the signs of prolonged use generally present in textiles found in Loulan cemeteries, it is possible that these older dated specimens survived in use long enough to serve as models for succeeding generations before they were finally interred with their deceased owners.⁴⁰ As we shall see below, a possible explanation for the persistence of certain standards of textile production over long periods of time could be ascribed to the use of textiles as standardised media of exchange.

References to textiles in 3rd to 4th- century Kharosthi documents from ancient Niya (Cadhotā)⁴¹

Written documents inscribed in the Kharosthi script have been unearthed in significant numbers from Niya and other sites.⁴² The language used in these documents is a particular dialect of Prakrit associated with the Gandharan

region (northwestern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan), but certain peculiarities in usage reveal glimpses of the local language of ancient Kroraina, which was clearly distinct from ‘Gandhari’ Prakrit. Based on a chronology of local kings appearing in these records, as well as evidence from Chinese ones, E. J. Rapson, John Brough, Enoki Kazuo, Lin Meicun and others have been able to arrive at a fairly precise date range for these documents: from the mid-3rd to the mid-4th century CE.⁴³ Translations reveal that, in its time, Stein’s Niya was known by the name ‘Cadhotā’.⁴⁴

This body of royal orders, taxation records, sale deeds and even private correspondence has made it possible for scholars including R. C. Agrawala, Christopher Atwood, Helen Wang and Mariner Padwa, among others, to reconstruct details of Cadhotan economy, administration, social order, industry and even the spatial distribution of kinship groupings.⁴⁵ This research has established the multicultural nature of Cadhotan society, revealing that it was

composed of the indigenous (possibly Tocharian-speaking) population, Gandharan settlers, Khotanese ‘refugees’, a certain ‘people of the mountain’, and some native Chinese.

Frequent references to textile products in the Kharosthi documents provide us with information that can be compared with material remains to give a clearer sense of the social, cultural and economic status of textiles in Cadhota. The terminology used to refer to textile items in these Kharosthi texts has already received scholarly attention (most notably in the work of Heinrich Lüders) and some of it has even been reliably translated into English.⁴⁶ In his translations, Thomas Burrow generally renders the words *tavastaga* (or *thavastae*) and *kojava* as ‘carpet’ and ‘rug’, respectively, and these terms shall be of particular interest to us.⁴⁷ Such interpretations, based primarily on

philological evidence, are also borne out to some extent by the contexts in which these terms appear in the Kharosthi texts.⁴⁸ For instance, the length of a *tavastaga* is communicated in terms of ‘*hasta*’ (hands), a unit elsewhere used to measure woollen cloth (§318), whereas a different system of units is used to quantify grain, wine and *ghee*.

An analysis of these documents gives every reason to believe that carpets and rugs not only played an important part in Cadhotan economy, but that they were also produced locally and on a regular, organised basis. This provides us with a context within which to situate the V&A weft-beater and the extant textiles. One way to test this is to examine surviving textiles for attributes that might link them to the literary references cited above.

The Stein Loan Collection includes a unique specimen, LOAN.STEIN.534 (fig. 10), which lends itself to this approach. Its weaver took the trouble to create a tapestry ground on a (minimum) three-shaft

construction when a simple tabby would have sufficed as foundation for the pile, suggesting that it was the tapestry, rather than the undyed wool pile, which was meant to be visible.⁴⁹ Was this textile, then, not a floor covering per se but some kind of bedding or blanket whose shaggy pile was meant to lie against the body and keep it warm?⁵⁰ This interpretation agrees with the Pali language

translation of the word *kojava* as ‘a rug or cover with long hair, a fleecy counterpane’. Burrow’s tentative interpretation of the term *alena kojava* (§549) as ‘a rug for lying down in’, if correct, further supports the Pali translation.⁵¹ The use of carpets and rugs as blankets or bedding is also alluded to by their discovery placed upon coffins and wrapped around corpses.

Archaeological and documentary evidence supporting the local production of textiles in Cadhota

Kharosthi records reveal that textiles, especially rugs, formed a substantial portion of revenue in Cadhota: a predominantly rural, subsistence economy largely dependent on agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and domestic industry, alongside more specialised industries. Farms and

orchards produced wheat, millet, barley, maize, peaches, pomegranates and a variety of other crop besides wine and dairy products like *ghee*. §207* provides a list of the items usually collected as tax:

The arrears of tax in Ajiyama-a'vana. [...] is to be sent to the feet of his majesty. [...] Pomegranates [...] 1 sap.ġa, 6 milima of oġana, 6 cloths, 1 cow, ghee [...] The sum of arrears is: The new and the old ghee 18 khi, 1 asamkharajīya (?), 6 rugs (kośava), 1 akiṣḍha, 5 pieces of cloth, 16 kamumta, 3 sacks, 3 baskets, 1 sheep, 1 milima 5 khi of wine potġoñena, 14 milima of corn, 1 cow.

Textile products such as *tavastaga*, *kojava*, *agisdha*, *arnavaji*, *namatae*, *raji* and *thavamnae* (in other words carpets, rugs, cloth and felt, among other items) are clearly identifiable in documents relating to taxation. Notably, while artisans such as potters, goldsmiths, bow-makers and arrow-makers appear in the documents, weavers are

conspicuously absent.⁵² Historian Christopher Atwood has suggested that this could point to textiles being produced ‘in the home by unspecialized labour’.⁵³ Significantly, no products made by the other artisan groups cited above appear in taxation records. Instead, most identifiable items owed as tax were either products of the land or (very likely) of domestic industry – from which it could also be inferred that tax textiles were produced locally through domestic industry.

Double burials discovered at Niya allow us to speculate on the social relevance of textiles and textile making by testifying to their role in the formation of gendered identities. Deceased couples were furnished

with a variety of objects that clearly specified their gender roles and these give us some sense of the different skills that men and women would have been expected to cultivate. How far Cadhotan life conformed to these idealised conventions in actual reality, it is difficult to tell, but the appearance of textile tools, such as needles and spindles, in connection with female ‘mummies’ gives an indication that such work normally fell within the feminine domain.⁵⁴ The discovery of spindles, spools of coloured yarn and even thimbles in such high status burials further points to the centrality of textile production and its related symbolism to both life and death in ancient Cadhota.[55]

Making textiles was an important and culturally significant activity that may have been practiced on a regular basis in homes and, as some evidence suggests, possibly even in monastic establishments.⁵⁶ If the extant ruins do represent farmsteads of extended family groups, as argued by Mariner Padwa,⁵⁷ then the discovery of beaters within such residential

enclaves supports the view that textile production was part of Cadhotan domestic life.⁵⁸ Certainly, the labour required for conducting the various stages of textile production would have been available in an extended family which, as we now know from the documents, would have included slaves and dependents. In fact, Padwa's work even allows us to identify the structures N.XIII and N.XXII, which yielded the V&A beater as well as the beater MAS.554, as part of the settlement referred to as 'Yave-avana' in the Kharosthi texts.⁵⁹ That beaters were found at more than one location in Yave-avana indicates that

weaving, as an activity, was dispersed even within the territorial extent of a single *avana* (roughly, a settlement comprised of several households that might be connected by ties of kinship).⁶⁰

Vineyards for carpets: were textiles used as money in Cadhota?

In addition to its social and cultural significance, textile production, including weaving, was an important

economic activity in ancient Cadhota. Records of transactions reveal that payments were made using various goods, including *kojava* and *tavastaga*, in addition to, or instead of, coins. The monetary worth of items being exchanged was reckoned in terms of *muli*, which appears to have been a form of local currency that functioned more often as a unit of account than as an actual coin.⁶¹ Transactions were governed by a generally accepted convention of conversion based on well-defined units of measure and units of account. For instance, *milima* was a measure equivalent to 20 *khi* and one *milima* of corn was worth one *muli*.⁶²

Significantly, *kojava* and *tavastaga* frequently appear as payment in sale deeds. §549 records the sale of a parcel of arable land for the price of one 'Khotanese alena rug and 5 milima of corn' together reckoned as being worth 15 *muli*. Bearing in mind that one *milima* of corn was worth one *muli*, it is possible to deduce that the rug was worth ten *muli*.

Compare this with §222 which reveals that a rug worth ten *muli* was exchanged for land capable of yielding five *khi* of 'adin' seed. For the same price, one could even purchase a cow (§327) or ten *khi* of wine (§571). Allowing for the fluctuations in prices that must no doubt have occurred over the roughly 100 years in time that these documents represent, we still have here a relative sense of the worth of such textiles. That carpets and rugs were offered as sole payment for parcels of land (§222, §579) indicates that these textiles could have high purchasing power. In fact, §431-2 contains a reference to a carpet 13 hands long whose monetary worth was equivalent to a quantity of gold in the form of 'one golden stater'. (See note 61.)

Further, §527 records an official inquiry and judicial ruling in the case of a dispute over ‘12 hands (length) of carpet and 6 milima of corn’. This instance clearly attests to the high value of such carpets.

What, then, was done with textiles collected as tax? Tax items, such as grain, wine and *ghee*, were collected and placed in stores. From here, they were disbursed as the need arose: in the form of salaries for officials, as ‘honorific gifts and provisions’ carried by diplomatic missions or envoys travelling to other kingdoms (§22, see also §214) or in the form of ‘clothing, food, and wages’ offered as payment for services rendered to the state (§19). Textiles from Cadhota would even have travelled as far as Loulan since we know that the revenue (or part of it) was regularly conveyed to the capital.⁶³ The maintenance of royal herds was also supported by these provincial

reserves (§55) and tax grain and wine were even used to purchase, among other items, carpets and rugs (§431-2, §448, §622). Other channels through which tax goods returned into circulation were not, strictly speaking, legal. Tax grain, *ghee* and wine were routinely loaned out by officials for personal gain and were sometimes brazenly appropriated for private use. Tax textiles might conceivably have circulated through much the same means as these other tax items.

As has been established elsewhere, textiles were portable and durable forms of wealth, as well as intrinsically useful objects, making them particularly well suited to serve as money along the Silk Road.⁶⁴ Much of the silk that lent its name to this network of travel and trade routes was, in fact, textile money in the form of bolts of standard dimensions and qualities that the Chinese administration pumped into the ‘western regions’ for the maintenance of its outposts and interests in that area. Carpets and rugs are fundamentally different from such textile yardage. Standard

bolts of cloth could be divided into sub-multiples or even turned into a suit of clothes, but this is not normally the case with a carpet.⁶⁵ Both as material objects and as stores of value, carpets and rugs offer greater stability than fabric yardage, since putting them to use would not normally preclude the possibility of trading them off at a later date. This might explain why in other contemporary Silk Road communities, such as Turfan, rugs regularly served as a medium of exchange.⁶⁶ According to Helen Wang, Curator of East Asian Money at the British Museum, ‘the use of carpets as media of

exchange in the Khotan and Turfan regions indicates that these were well established forms of money in Eastern Central Asia’.⁶⁷

The use of textiles as an efficient medium of exchange presupposes a fair degree of standardisation and there is evidence to support this in the context of Cadhota.⁶⁸ Conspicuously, bolts of silk appear only infrequently in the Kharosthi records from Niya and, then too, seldom feature in economic transactions in the way that carpets or animals do.⁶⁹ The appearance of bolts of silk in the penalty clauses of legal documents or as fines for various transgressions within the monastic community (where this would have been expected to act as a strong deterrent) indicates that silk in Cadhota was a relatively rare and precious commodity, circulating within a limited social and economic sphere. If Cadhotans did in fact use textiles as money then it seems that locally produced textiles rather than

Chinese silk would have been preferred.⁷⁰



Figure 12 – Obaidullai Khan, with his Sons and Villagers, Mirigram. Marc Aurel Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan, 1912), plate 19. © Toyo Bunko Copy Services

One source of evidence for standardisation among the products of the indigenous textile industry is in the form of a ubiquitous feature of ruined Niya dwellings: what Stein has referred to as the ‘raised sitting platform’. Stein and his local workmen noted that, in several aspects, ancient Niya dwellings closely resembled traditional Uyghur dwellings where low platforms covered with carpets and other furnishings served both for sitting and sleeping on (see fig. 12). The persistence in this region of ancient forms and practices well into the

modern era allows us to speculate that the sitting platform occupied as much of an important position in Cadhotan domestic life as it did in the local homes Stein visited in the region and that textiles, particularly carpets, would have been used in much the same way in ancient times to cover and decorate the platforms and floors.⁷¹ In his 1964 monograph on Khotan carpets, Hans Bidder has suggested that ‘it is to this platform that one must look for the original carpet sizes’, since ‘the shape and measurement of the Khotan carpets [...] are regulated by the size of the “Aivan” platform’.⁷² A survey of the dimensions of the sitting platforms found by Stein at Niya shows that these measured between 3.75 and 4.5 feet in breadth. This range comfortably accommodates the dimensions of a well-preserved carpet specimen from Niya, numbered M3:28, which measures approximately 4.2 feet in width.⁷³

Kharosthi texts provide additional evidence for the standardisation of textiles in Cadhota. §207 refers to ‘6 cloths [...] 6 rugs (koṣava), 1 akiṣḍha, 5 pieces of cloth’ expected in

fulfilment of tax arrears and §173 states that ‘in Suḡiya’s hundred one rug (*kojava*) is to be given’.⁷⁴ That units of such textiles could be anticipated in advance indicates that specific qualities and sizes were assumed.⁷⁵

We might also approach this subject from another angle. It was usually in instances of transactions or disputes that there was a need to record in writing the specific dimensions or value of these textiles. Even in these documents, however, *kojava* are never accompanied by measurements, whereas *tavastaga* nearly always are.⁷⁶ Some *kojava* were priced at five *muli* and others at ten (§327, §222, §549) but it is unclear what determined the difference.⁷⁷ As for carpets (*tavastaga*), their length seems to have served as sufficient indication of their monetary worth.⁷⁸ For example, the sale deed §590 records the lengths but not the

prices in *muli** of the carpets offered in part payment for the purchase of a slave woman. It does, however, mention the prices in *muli* of the camels also being offered in payment. A comparison of this document with another sale deed, §579, allows us to deduce that one *hasta* (along the length) of a carpet was worth roughly nine-tenths of a *muli* in both instances.⁷⁹ This close agreement in price-per-*hasta* of carpet between two documents separated by a temporal span of eight years is remarkable.⁸⁰ It would appear, then, that the price of one *hasta* of carpet was fairly stable during this period at least and that the worth of a *tavastaga* was reckoned by multiplying this fixed value by the total length in *hasta* units. This would imply that the width, if not the actual knotting or weave quality of such textiles, usually conformed to a fixed standard.

This theory receives further support from the remarkable group of complete (or nearly complete) pile carpets and woollen blankets more recently recovered from Niya,

Loulan, Yingpan and Shanpula. At Yingpan, woollen blankets with fringed or tasseled edges were mostly found. A description by Li Wenying (Deputy Director of the Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology) of woollen blankets with fringed or tasselled edges found at Yingpan reveals that these were generally ‘naturally colored, coarse [...] in plain or twill weave, 80 to 85 cm wide and about 150 cm long’.⁸¹ Clearly, such blankets came in a fairly standard quality and size.⁸² Another noteworthy group includes three carpets featuring lions and measuring roughly 100 cm by 260 cm on average.⁸³ Two in

particular, one from Yingpan and the other from a gravesite near the Loulan site L. E. are so closely matched in terms of size, pile technique and even the treatment of the lions that Li Wenying believes these were ‘undoubtedly woven following the same design’.⁸⁴ She further observes that ‘the fact that these carpets were cut along the selvages indicates that carpets with the same designs and colors were probably produced in bolts at the same time and place’.⁸⁵

It is very likely, then, that indigenous textile production in Cadhota, and possibly in the general region, conformed to a fair degree of standardisation.⁸⁶ Acknowledging

some standardised production does not, however, preclude the possibility of textiles being made to meet special requirements or according to individual tastes. A spectacular carpet featuring a majestic, sinuously rendered lion, as discovered in the 3rd to 4th-century grave of the exquisitely attired and evidently wealthy ‘Yingpan man’, is an unusual piece that may have been specially commissioned.

Further, the diversity represented by surviving specimens of such textiles, particularly the sheer variety of pile structures employed, serves to complicate and challenge any simplistic notion of standardisation. It is essential, therefore, to also compare patterns, structural features and the contexts

of these finds in order to arrive at a more complete understanding. Yet, if the overall theory presented here is generally correct, it offers a compelling explanation for the remarkable clarity of the spots on the V&A’s beater, as a tool used consistently to weave a specific kind of textile.

Conclusion

Upon discovering a pair of richly hued carpet fragments at Loulan, Stein remarked that ‘it was the first ancient specimen of an industry attested in the Khotan region from very early times [...] which I had so far succeeded in bringing to light’, before cautiously admitting that, ‘whether these carpets actually came from Khotan it is, of course, impossible to assert’.⁸⁷ This article has considered wooden weft-beaters from the collections of the V&A and British Museum, surviving textiles and other archaeological finds, in conjunction with contemporary manuscripts, to

confirm Stein's speculations about the local origins of these textiles.

Unique marks on the V&A's weft-beater have helped to connect the *kojava*, *tavastaga* and other textiles in these documents with surviving objects preserved by extraordinary natural conditions, highlighting the probability that these were locally produced. In order to further nuance these findings, a comparative analysis of early pile specimens recovered from sites such as Palmyra, Dura-Europos, Berenike and the At-Tar caves with those from Xinjiang would prove illuminating, particularly with regard to shared characteristics, such as pile occurring on both sides of the textiles.

While Kharosthi texts have allowed us to appreciate the socio-economic worth of textile production, use and exchange in Cadhota, the appearance of carpets in burials attests to their cultural and symbolic value, linking them to a more widely

occurring practice in evidence at other early sites, as well as to funereal traditions that have survived into the modern era.⁸⁸ Thus, we might view the weft-beaters not merely as utilitarian implements, or as representatives of a broad and diverse ancient material culture, but also as tools employed in generating economic, social and cultural capital.

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preparing it for publication.

Endnotes

1. A fourth Central Asian expedition (1930-1) ran into serious opposition from the Chinese authorities, forcing Stein to abandon it partway through.
2. Aurel Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), vol. 3, 1317.
3. For a popular account, see Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for the Lost Treasures of Central Asia*, 2006 edn (London: John Murray, 1980).
4. Verity Wilson, 'Early Textiles from Central Asia: Approaches to Study with Reference to the Stein Loan Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London', *Textile History* 26. 1 (1995): 45.
5. Wilson, 'Early Textiles from Central Asia', 45. See also Anne Godden Amos, 'The Stein Loan of Textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum', *V&A Conservation Journal* 26 (January 1998),

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-26/the-stein-loan-of-textiles-in-the-victoria-and-albert-museum/>, para 6 of 14. For more information on how this material came to be at the V&A, see Helen Wang, Helen Persson and Frances Wood, 'Dunhuang Textiles in London: A History of the Collection', in *Sir Aurel Stein, Colleagues and Collections*, ed. by Helen Wang, British Museum Research Publication 184 (2012), http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/19_Wang-Persson-Wood.pdf. Regarding conservation history and current storage conditions see the following publications: Joan Joshua, 'The Restoring of Ancient Textiles', *Embroidery* (September 1933): 15-18; Amos, 'The Stein Loan of Textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum'; Verity Wilson, 'A New Resource for the Study of Central Asian Textiles: Stein Textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum', *Oxford Asian Textile Group Newsletter* 30 (February 2005), <http://www.oatg.org.uk/Newsletters/N30.pdf>; Helen Persson, 'Stein Mellon Textile Project at the V&A', *V&A Conservation Journal* 55 (Spring 2007), <https://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-55/stein-mellon-textile-project-at-the-v-and-a/>; Thórdís Baldursdóttir, 'Storage of the Stein Loan Collection', *V&A Conservation Journal* 55 (Spring 2007), <https://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-55/stein-mellon-textile-project-at-the-v-and-a/>;

- [journal/issue-55/storage-of-the-stein-loan-collection/](https://www.vam.ac.uk/page/s/stein-collection/). For a more detailed overview of the range of materials and sites represented, see ‘The Stein Collection’, Victoria and Albert Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/page/s/stein-collection/>. The V&A’s Stein material has been digitised and is accessible on the Museum’s website using the ‘Search the Collections’ feature.
6. Helen Persson, ‘Ethnicity Mobility and Status – Textiles from the Taklamakan Desert’, in *Textiles as Cultural Expressions: Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America, September 24-27, 2008, Honolulu, Hawaii* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii, 2009), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/235>, 2.
 7. Wang, Persson and Wood, ‘Dunhuang Textiles in London’, 5-6.
 8. For a fuller bibliography of research drawing on the V&A’s Stein textile holdings, see Helen Wang and John Perkins, eds, *Handbook to the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the UK* (London: The British Museum, 2008), 2nd edn, ed. by Helen Wang, [www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%20Handbook%20final\(3\).pdf](http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%20Handbook%20final(3).pdf).
 9. See Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *The Mummies of Ürümchi* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).
 10. Wang, Persson and Wood, ‘Dunhuang Textiles in London’, 6.
 11. Persson, ‘Ethnicity Mobility and Status’, 4. Interestingly, the earliest archaeological indication as yet discovered for the production of pile textiles comes not from actual textile specimens but in the form of a tool: a distinctive type of bronze knife that is thought to have been used for cutting pile yarn. E. J. W. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to the Aegean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991; repr. 1992), 171, note 10.
 12. This phrase was used by Stein to describe wooden objects of the kind that we shall consider in this essay. Whether in fact this object was an implement of ‘home industry’ is a question we shall consider in subsequent sections of this essay. Marc Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), vol. 1, 377.
 26. For an overview of research conducted on the Dunhuang textiles at the V&A, see Wang, Persson and

13. 'The Stein Collection', Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O97766/the-stein-collection-weft-beater-unknown/>.
14. Cultivated white poplar and the wild black poplar were both easily available at Niya, as testified by extant material remains. The former was preferred for construction and writing stationery at Niya. Other varieties such as mulberry also appear to have been cultivated at the site and it is also possible that one of those was the source of wood for the beater.
15. For 1907,1111.97, see 'Comb Beater', The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=229669&partId=1&searchText=1907,1111.97&page=1. For MAS.554, see 'Comb Beater', The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=228854&partId=1&searchText=MAS.554&page=1. For MAS.727, see 'Comb Beater', The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=228690&partId=1&searchText=MAS.727&page=1.
16. It would be appropriate at this juncture to mention other relevant specimens of this type of object. Three similar objects, now at the British Museum, numbered in the series 1925,0619.73-75, were acquired by Sir Clarmont P. Skrine in the same general region in the 1920s. Since these are currently undated, it is difficult to say whether they are contemporary to the Niya-Loulan pieces. The first two of the Skrine series share certain features with another British Museum piece, MAS.472, retrieved by Stein from Mazar-Toghrak and dated approximately to the 8th century CE. Of the three Skrine specimens, two seem to have been acquired in Keriya. See Daniel C. Waugh and Ursula Sims-Williams, 'The Old Curiosity Shop in Khotan', *The Silk Road* 8 (2010): 76. This might be significant in view of the fact that the third piece in the Skrine series shares certain formal attributes, particularly the triangular shape of the 'handle' with another such object recovered from the Keriya region, now held at the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum in Urumqi, and dated to between the 4th and 6th centuries CE. See Yue Feng, *Xinjiang lishi wenming jicui* [Best Collections of Xinjiang History and Civilization] (Xinjiang měishù shèyǐng chūbǎnshè, 2009), 150. I am grateful to Dr Zhang He for alerting me to this publication. This last mentioned specimen was also featured in the exhibition: Victor Mair (curator); *Secrets of the Silk Road*. Philadelphia: Penn Museum, 2011. A comparison of the information obtained from the exhibition catalogue and gallery label reveals some discrepancies regarding

the place of discovery of this object. Dr Zhang He has also alerted me to the presence of yet another such wooden comb-like object at the Khotan Museum. According to the museum label, this piece was found at Niya and has been dated to the Han period. The shape of this specimen is akin to that of another such object also from Niya, severely cracked and desiccated, featured in Feng Zhao and Zhiyong Yu, eds, *Legacy of the Desert King: Textiles and Treasures Excavated at Niya on the Silk Road* (Hangzhou and Urumqi: China National Silk Museum and Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology, 2000), 45. The Sino-Swedish expedition also uncovered one such object in the Lop-nor region. See Folke Bergman, *Archaeological researches in Sinkiang, especially the Lop-Nor region* (Stockholm: Bokförlags aktiebolaget Thule, 1939), PI 27:12. Finally, there is a broken fragment of a similar wooden comb-like object, L.M.II.iii.03, recovered by Stein from the site L.M. See Aurel Stein, *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kan-su and Eastern Īrān*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), vol. 1, 203, also vol. 4, pl. XXVI.

17. The first such object discovered by Stein at Niya is listed as a ‘currycomb’ in the index of *Ancient Khotan* and its apparent resemblance to one is noted on multiple occasions. Yet, both in the

descriptive catalogue, as well as the main text, this observation (intended as a visual reference) prefaces a clear description of the object’s function as weft-beater. See Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, vol. 1, 377, 413. On another occasion, Stein likens the object to a sizing brush based on its resemblance to one depicted in a painted panel from Dandan-Uilik. See Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, 260. The author of the descriptive catalogues accompanying Stein’s expedition reports, F. H. Andrews, though acknowledging the similarity in form was clearly aware of the differences in function between a weft-beater and a sizing brush. (Compare pages 300 and 413 in Stein, *Ancient Khotan*). Such inconsistencies are absent in Stein, *Serindia* and Stein, *Innermost Asia* (Stein’s reports of his second and third Central Asian expeditions respectively), where objects of this sort are identified throughout and unambiguously as weaving instruments. Further, Andrews explicitly draws a connection between a comparable object of significantly later date discovered at the site of Mazar-Toghraq and the weft-beaters then still in use in ‘Turkestān’. Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 210.

18. Peter Collingwood, *Rug Weaving Techniques: Beyond the Basics* (Loveland: Interweave Press, 1990), 10.

19. Later examples of similar objects demonstrate a clear evolution of this form into one more easily identifiable with weft-beaters still in use today. MAS.472 at the British Museum is dated approximately to the 8th century and was retrieved from Mazar-Tograkh, another site along the southern rim of the Tarim basin. With its fine and closely arranged teeth, this later model appears to fit more readily with the present conception of a weft-beater than the four pieces discussed above. The entry for this object in the descriptive catalogue of *Serindia* reads as follows: ‘wooden comb, used in weaving (now called panje in Turkestān)’. Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 210.
20. As far as we can confidently tell, the same reed/warp-spacer or warp arrangement may have been used consistently. This does not imply uniformity in designs, colours and weaves.
21. An image of another such beater discovered by the Sino-Swedish expedition in the Lop-nor area shows that it too has a curved edge. Bergman, *Archaeological researches in Sinkiang*, Pl 27:12. A gentle curvature along the toothed edge seems to be present also in the 4th- to 6th-century specimen now at the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum in Urumqi. See note 16 above.
22. It is possible that this curvature is a skeuomorphic feature that might indicate the use of a different material for making weft-beaters in an earlier period. For instance, Arthur MacGregor writes that ‘many cetacean bone beaters from Norway have curved blades, a feature which Hoffmann (1964) attributes to the natural shape of the cetacean bones from which they were fashioned. This curvature was of no particular benefit during use, so that the occurrence of wooden weaving swords displaying the same shape, also catalogued by Hoffmann, is a further instance of the morphology of the skeletal raw material conditioning the development of tools in other media’. See Arthur MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory & Horn: The Technology of Skeletal Materials since the Roman Period* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 188.
23. F. H. Andrews, in describing the first such object found at Niya, observed that ‘the thick edge [...] [is] rounded into a form to fit comfortably into the palm of the hand, and furnished with a projecting knob to give firmness to the stroke in using’. See Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, vol. 1, 413.
24. I am grateful to Vijay Paul Punia for this insight. Email correspondence with Swati Venkat, 5 December 2012. Many traditional patterns of weft-beater known to us today incorporate an

angle between the handle and teeth to allow the weaver to exert effort in a direction that is natural and comfortable especially when working at a vertical loom. By this token, although perhaps anachronistically, the V&A's beater seems better suited to the horizontal format. But this observation cannot, of course, be treated as a conclusive indication mainly because we are dealing with a period for which little else is known regarding weaving methods in this region.

25. Elizabeth Wayland Barber, 'More Light on the Xinjiang Textiles', in *Reconfiguring the Silk Road: New Research on East-West Exchange in Antiquity*, ed. by Victor H. Mair and Jane Hickman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2014), 35. The discovery of objects (tentatively) identified as loom weights at some sites suggests that warp-weighted looms were used in the region. While it is possible to weave pile on vertical warp-weighted looms, we can be fairly certain that the V&A's beater was not associated with this sort of loom. In a vertical warp-weighted setup, weaving usually grows downwards, employing an upward beating motion. In such a scenario, the very bulk of such beaters would have rendered all but the smallest entirely ineffective (although horizontal warp-

weighted looms are not unknown).

Interestingly, we do have a specimen of the kind of comb that might have been better suited to this task than the large, heavy ones already discussed.

Described in *Serindia* as a 'wooden weaver's comb, long truncated triangle. Very short teeth' and accompanied by the suggestion

'perhaps for carding', MAS.557 from Niya (and now at the British Museum), deviates widely from the other beaters here discussed in terms of size as well as form. It might have been intended for use in weaving finer fabrics such as the woollen taquetés and tapestries. It may even have been used in conjunction with a warp-weighted loom. See Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 257.

See also 'Comb', The British Museum,

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection/objectId=228851&partId=1&searchText=MAS.557&p>

26. Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38. A number of blue resist-dyed cotton fabrics unearthed from the Late Roman levels of the Egyptian port site of Berenike have been convincingly identified as Indian in origin. It is possible, therefore, that the Niya specimen, too, originated in India. John Peter Wild and Felicity Wild, 'Rome and India: early Indian cotton textiles from Berenike, Red Sea coast of Egypt', in *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies*, ed. by Ruth Barnes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 14-16.

27. Grave M15 at Yingpan, dated to between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, contained the body of a male dressed in exquisite woollen fabrics, displaying such technical complexity and superlative execution that it seems unlikely that these were products of local manufacture. Similarly, some fine tapestries, such as those recovered from the Loulan cemeteries, seem to have been imported.

28. Graves at Niya and Loulan have yielded significant quantities of textiles, including clothing. While wool and cotton have been found, silk is particularly well represented. Certain features in the construction of clothing, either made of silk or trimmed with it, suggest that although the silk fabric came from China, the actual assembly of these garments was done locally and according to local styles. See Ma Yong and Sun Yutang, 'The Western Regions under the Hsiung-nu and the Han', in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: The development of sedentary and nomadic civilizations: 700 B.C. to A.D. 250*, ed. by János Harmatta et al, 2 of 4 vols (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994; repr. 1996), 224. For an overview of textiles recovered from the burials at Niya of what seem to be members of the local royalty or nobility, see Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*. For a survey of textiles unearthed from the Yingpan burials, see Li Wenying,

'Textiles of the Second to Fifth Century Unearthed from Yingpan Cemetery', in *Central Asian textiles and their contexts in the early Middle Ages*, ed. by Regula Schorta, Riggisberger Berichte 9 (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2006).

29. Fâ-hien, trans. by James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 13.

30. It is possible that a variety of finer fabrics such as the patterned taquetés and tapestry flatweaves were woven using smaller and lighter weft-beaters such as MAS.727 with closer set teeth than the three others which are clearly too heavy and broad for that task.

31. 'Textile / Carpet', The British Museum, <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection/objectId=228868&partId=1&searchText=MAS.540.a-c&page=1>.

32. 'Textile / Carpet', The British Museum, <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection/objectId=228725&partId=1&searchText=MAS.693&page>

33. 'The Stein Collection', Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93095/the-stein-collection-carpet-fragment-unknown/>.

34. In Sylwan's chosen terms, the warp arrangement is described as follows: '54-58 threads to 10cm., in the selvage about 20 threads to 5 cm'. Bergman,

- Archaeological researches in Sinkiang*, 131.
35. 'The Stein Collection', Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93006/the-stein-collection-carpet-fragment-unknown/>.
36. Wu Min, 'Study on Some Ancient Wool Fabrics Unearthed in Recent Years from Xinjiang of China', *Al-Rāfidān* 17 (1996): 2, 15-16.
37. Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*, 80.
38. A similar comparison with the other complete (or nearly complete) carpets recovered from roughly contemporary sites at Niya, Loulan, Yingpan and Shanpula would, no doubt, constitute the logical next step in this study. For a list of some of the complete carpets discovered thus far, see: Zhang He, 'Figurative and Inscribed Carpets from Shanpula, Khotan: Unexpected Representations of the Hindu God Krishna. A Preliminary Study', *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 5 (2010): 70.
39. Persson, 'Ethnicity Mobility and Status', 9.
40. Stein, *Innermost Asia*, vol. 1, 227, 231.
41. The following discussions draw upon information from Kharosthi documents from Niya and other sites as transcribed in A. M. Boyer, E. J. Rapson, E. Senart and P. S. Noble, *Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions Discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan*, 3 parts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920-9) and translated in T. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharoṣṭhī Documents from Chinese Turkestan* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1940). I have also referred to the latter's 2nd electronic edition (London: International Dunhuang Project, 2013), <http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\ cat.a4d?shortref=Burrow\ 1940&catno=001>. Henceforth, the sign 'Š' will be used to indicate numbers assigned to Kharosthi documents in the aforementioned publications. Where document numbers are followed by the '*' sign, translations have been amended with reference to the transcriptions.
42. Kharosthi inscriptions have been found not only on wooden tablets and leather documents, but also on stone, on some wall paintings and even on textiles at a number of sites. Of these, documents collected from Niya represent the largest and most significant corpus of such material.
43. See the following publications: E. J. Rapson and P. S. Noble, *Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions Discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan Part III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 323-8; John Brough,

- ‘Comments on Third Century Shan-Shan and the History of Buddhism’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28. 3 (1965): 582-612; Enoki Kazuo, ‘The location of the capital of Lou-lan and the date of Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions’, *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 22 (1963) [published 1966]: 125-71; John Brough, ‘Supplementary Notes on Third Century Shan-Shan’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33. 1 (1970): 39-45; Lin Meicun, ‘A New Kharoṣṭhī Wooden Tablet from China’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53. 2 (1990): 283-91.
44. It is generally accepted that Cadhota was the capital of a minor kingdom called Jingjue that may have fallen under Hun dominion before it became part of the kingdom of Kroraina by around the 3rd century CE. Kroraina, which may have had its seat at what is now the site of Loulan, had been subjugated by the Chinese (who called it Shan-Shan) in the 1st century BCE, remaining since then a vassal state but with what appears to have been a considerable degree of autonomy.
45. Some notable publications are as follows: Ratna Chandra Agrawala, ‘Position of Women as depicted in the Kharoṣṭhī Documents from Chinese Turkestan’, *Indian Historical Quarterly* 28. 4 (1952): 327-41; Ratna Chandra Agrawala, ‘Position of Slaves and Serfs as depicted in the Kharoṣṭhī Documents from Chinese Turkestan’, *Indian Historical Quarterly* 29. 2 (1953): 97-110; Christopher Atwood, ‘Life in Third-Fourth Century Cadh’ota: A Survey of Information Gathered from the Prakrit Documents Found North of Minfeng (Niyā)’, in *The Silk Road: Key Papers, Part I: Pre-Islamic Period*, ed. by Valerie Hansen (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012), 115-43 [this paper first appeared in the *Central Asiatic Journal* 35 (1991): 3-4]; Helen Wang, *Money on the Silk Road: The Evidence from Eastern Central Asia to c. AD 800* (London: The British Museum Press, 2004), 65-74; Mariner Ezra Padwa, ‘An Archaic Fabric: Culture and Landscape in an Early Inner Asian Oasis (3rd-4th Century C.E. Niya)’ (Unpublished PhD thesis: Harvard University, 2007).
46. See Heinrich Lüders, ‘Textilien im alten Turkistan’, *Abhandlungen des Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 3 (1936): 1-38. See also Ratna Chandra Agrawala, ‘A Study of Textiles & Garments in the Kharoṣṭhī Documents from Chinese Turkestan’, *Bhāratīya Vidhyā* 14 (1953): 75-94.
47. Burrow sometimes translates *tavastaga* as ‘tapestry’ although there seem to be stronger linguistic grounds

for 'carpet' as a suitable interpretation. See T. Burrow, *The Language of the Kharoṣṭhi Documents From Chinese Turkestan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 94.

48. Both terms, *kojava* and *tavastaga*, often appear grouped together with textile items such as felt and cloth in lists also containing non-textile objects. This placement suggests that *kojava* and *tavastaga* were textile products. Additionally, *tavastaga* are often measured in 'hasta' (hands), a unit elsewhere used to measure woollen cloth (§318). *kojava* are only counted as individual objects with no reference to dimensions - indicating that they may have come in standard sizes. The colour of these *kojava* is mentioned only rarely (§431-2) and some are specifically identified as 'Khotanese' (§549, §583, §592) but no further descriptors are provided, except for an instance where the epithet has not been conclusively translated (see §549 for 'Khotanese *alena* rug'). Two other as yet obscure terms, '*arnavaji*' and '*agisdha*', are treated by the authors of the documents in a manner comparable with *tavastaga* and *kojava*. *Arnavaji* and *agisdha* are both grouped with other textile products when they appear in lists that also include non-textile items (§714, §207). *Arnavaji*, like *tavastaga*, is measured in *hasta* in §83 and its length

of eight *hasta* as recorded in this document is comparable with that of a *tavastaga* in §578. Although this does not necessarily mean that *arnavaji* was also a carpet of some sort, we cannot as yet dismiss the possibility. The colour of an *arnavaji* is mentioned on one occasion (§83). *Agisdha* is mentioned along with other items of 'clothing and bedding' in §431-2, leading Burrow to suggest that *agisdha* is 'probably some kind of rug or blanket' or 'some woven material'. See Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharoṣṭhi Documents*, 28, 38. Like *kojava*, these are generally counted as discrete objects without reference to dimensions. '*Namatae*' (or '*namataga*') is yet another textile product which is quantified in this way. The term may refer either to felt garments or to felt rugs. See Burrow, *The Language of the Kharoṣṭhi Documents*, 100. At present, it is not clear whether the terms *arnavaji*, *agisdha* and *namatae* were used to refer to carpets or rugs at all. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I shall concern myself with *kojava* and *tavastaga* which can be interpreted more securely as 'carpet' and 'rug' respectively on the basis of strong philological evidence.

49. Helen Persson has also identified some soumak detail in this piece. Helen Persson, 'Pile carpets and flat weaves from the Silk Road' (paper presented at the International Conference of

Oriental Carpets, Stockholm, Sweden, June 16-19, 2011). I am indebted to Helen Persson for so generously sharing with me the unpublished text of this paper.

50. A textile such as LOAN.STEIN.534 (fig. 10), may have been placed with its pile facing up at night for warmth as bedding and then been turned over during the day to show its brighter flatwoven side in which case the dense pile on the underside would still provide a comfortable cushioning effect while sitting or reclining. Another piece discussed by Wu Min, 80LBMB2:93 recovered from the grave B2 at Gutai in the Loulan area, reportedly displays what appears to be cut-loop pile on both faces. Observing that the pile on the ‘reverse’ is damaged and matted together, possibly on account of friction caused by contact with the body and through the absorption of sweat, she surmises that this textile might have served as bedding. Wu Min, ‘Study on Some Ancient Wool Fabrics’, 4.
51. See Burrow, *The Language of the Kharoṣṭhī Documents*, 84, 77. In light of this, §431-2 might also be seen as offering additional support to the idea that *kojava* was an item of bedding. Hans Bidder discusses the terminology used to describe foreign made carpets or rugs in early Chinese literature and suggests that the terms

‘*ch’ü-yü*’ and ‘*t’a-teng*’ might represent Chinese renderings of the words ‘*kojava*’ and ‘*tavastaga*’ respectively. It is unclear whether the former Chinese term referred to pile textiles at all whereas, on account of a strong philological indication, Bidder is confident that the latter term refers to knotted carpets. Other scholars, such as Ma Yong, have suggested a possible link between the Chinese term ‘*ch’ü - so*’ and the term ‘*kojava*’. See Wu Min, ‘Study on Some Ancient Wool Fabrics’, 12. If that idea is indeed correct, then the following, cited by Bidder from an ancient Chinese source, might enable us to distinguish qualitatively between *kojava* and *tavastaga*: ‘the finer form of “*ch’ü - so*” is called “*t’a-teng*”’. For a lengthier discussion, see Hans Bidder, *Carpets from Eastern Turkestan: Known as Khotan, Samarkand and Kansu Carpets* (New York: Universe Books, 1964), 30-34. See also Zhang He, ‘The Terminology for Carpets in Ancient Central Asia’, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 257 (May 2015). A general survey of sleeping rugs produced by diverse rug-weaving peoples in more recent times shows that such textiles often feature pile that is shaggier and longer than that found in floor coverings, where the pile is usually trimmed. Bearing this in mind, and considering the philological and contextual evidence we already have for interpreting *kojava* as items of

- bedding, the difference in qualities between *kojava* and *tavastaga* as indicated by the Chinese remark above might be understood as corresponding to a distinction in function between bedding and floor covering respectively. See John T. Wertime, 'Back to Basics: "Primitive" Pile Rugs of West and Central Asia', *Hali* 100 (1998): 86-97 for examples of sleeping rugs produced in various parts of Asia.
52. See §361 for bow-makers, §578 for 'goldsmiths of the people of the mountain', §621 for potters and §715 for arrow-makers. Such textual evidence of specialised artisanal production is supported to some extent by archaeological finds.
53. Atwood, 'Life in Third-Fourth Century Cadh'ota', 119.
54. Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, 39-40. See also Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*, 44.
55. Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*, 44, 46, 84-5, 87.
56. The beater MAS.727, from Loulan L.B., was discovered inside a particularly large structure adjoining what Stein supposed was a Buddhist shrine. Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 404.
57. See Padwa, 'An Archaic Fabric'.
58. All the beaters discovered at Niya by Stein, including MAS.557 (discussed in note 25), were found amidst the ruins of such structures. Both MAS.727 and a broken wooden beater with the Stein number LM.II.iii.03 were discovered in similar settings at Loulan. As for the two other Niya beaters discussed in note 16, I have been unable to locate information regarding their find spots.
59. Padwa, 'An Archaic Fabric', 164-6, 170-72.
60. For the purposes of governance and taxation, an *avana* was also treated as a spatially defined administrative unit. For a more in-depth discussion regarding the significance of *avana*, see and compare Atwood, 'Life in Third-Fourth Century Cadh'ota' and Padwa, 'An Archaic Fabric'.
61. There are references to golden staters, drachmas and *masa*, which may have served as coins, weights and/or units of account; in general, however, these appear less frequently than muli in the Kharosthi texts. For a broader discussion of money in the Kharosthi documents, see Wang, *Money on the Silk Road*, 65-74. To judge from these documents, Cadhotans were more accustomed to using media of exchange such as grain, wine and textiles rather than coins. Standard bolts of Chinese silk that served as money even as far afield as Loulan and Turfan do not seem to have been as common in Cadhota.

62. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharoṣṭhī Documents*, 39.
63. See also §622 for carpets bought in Cadhota being sent to the capital.
64. For a detailed discussion, see Helen Wang, 'Textiles as Money on the Silk Road?', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23. 2 (April 2013): 165-74. For specific case studies, see other articles in the same special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.
65. For an interesting exception, see Valerie Hansen and Xinjiang Rong, 'How the Residents of Turfan used Textiles as Money, 273 - 796 CE', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23. 2 (April 2013): 297 for '6 and a half carpets'. For present-day examples of the dividing up of carpets in the same region, see Bidder, *Carpets from Eastern Turkestan*, 9. Bidder recounts an instance wherein four brothers fighting over their deceased father's property decided to cut up a precious carpet into quarters so that they could share it among themselves.
66. Valerie Hansen and Xinjiang Rong, 'How the Residents of Turfan used Textiles'. See also Wang, *Money on the Silk Road*, 78. Of Turfan, Helen Wang writes that 'from the late 3rd century to the early 6th century, silk and carpets were the main forms of money for purchases, loans and hiring labour'. Helen Wang, 'How much for a camel? -
- A new understanding of money on the Silk Road before AD 800', in *The Silk Road - Trade, Travel, War and Faith*, ed. by Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams (London: British Library Publishing, 2004), 31-2.
67. Wang, 'How much for a camel?', 31-2, see also note 31.
68. This seems also to have been the case in Turfan. Valerie Hansen and Xinjiang Rong, 'How the Residents of Turfan used Textiles', 284.
69. It appears that bolts of silk were generally used by outsiders and by those Cadhotans who had dealings with outsiders or with the capital. See Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, 49.
70. Although it has been posited that some may have been produced in Cadhota, it is far more likely that the silk referred to in these documents came from China. The remains of silk cocoons, alongside the seeds and desiccated trunks of mulberry trees found at Niya, suggest that some silk fabrics, probably the plainer varieties, may have been produced there. See Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, 39.
71. In a passage extolling the practical advantages of the *aiwan*, which was 'a kind of square central hall or Atrium' found 'in well-to-do people's houses

throughout the southern oases', Stein commented that these 'seemed delightfully adapted to the climate'; on account of this, he 'felt sure from personal experience that much of the daily life, long dead and buried, must have passed in those ruined Aiwan's' encountered repeatedly in the ancient residences he had excavated. Marc Aurel Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, 2 vols (London: MacMillan and Co., 1912), vol. 1, 135-6.

72. Bidder, *Carpets from Eastern Turkestan*, 35, 40.

73. The dimensions were reported in centimetres as '128 cm by 295 cm'. It is unclear whether this piece is complete along its length since the publication cited here does not include a full image of the object. Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*, 80.

74. 'Hundred' here refers to a unit presumably composed of a hundred households or a hundred individuals. For a discussion on the 'hundreds', see Padwa, 'An Archaic Fabric', 87.

75. It is unclear whether the same was applicable to *tavastaga* since we know that these came in a wide range of sizes. From the available textual evidence, it appears that *tavastaga* ranged in length from four to 23 *hasta*. The document numbered Niya

91NA15+91NA18 contains what appears to be a reference to a *tavastaga* 23 hands long but unfortunately, I have been unable to access a translation. For the transcription, see Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass, 'Niya 91NA15+91NA18', <http://gandhari.org/a/document.php?catid=CKD0797>.

76. Admittedly, *tavastaga* (carpets) appear without reference to measurements in documents like §622 and §633 but in the latter instance even *ghee* receives the same treatment. We might put this omission down to the nature of these documents as being quite different from tax assessments or receipts. In another instance (§534), the length of a carpet is absent presumably because the document is a list of goods deposited by someone. Thus, in instances where the monetary worth of the carpet is an important consideration, its length is mentioned without fail.

77. By comparing the few instances where it is possible to definitively ascertain the value of *kojava* we find that they were worth either five *muli* or ten. The different prices might be indicative of different sizes or perhaps qualities although the Khotanese *alena kojava* (§549) was worth the same as a *kojava* of unspecified type (§222). Five and ten *muli* were fairly large sums and if

indeed *kojava* came in multiple varieties, which was submitted as tax?

78. In all instances the authors of these documents only recorded the length of *tavastaga* in *hasta*, as if to say that all other attributes such as width, weave, material, patterns and finishes conformed to a fixed set of standards. This imparts the impression that *tavastaga* were akin to textile yardage when, in fact, carpets are quite distinct from that class of textiles. Perhaps the length of a carpet was enough to communicate a fixed set of proportions that the transacting parties were already familiar with? This, in turn, might have served as a tacit indicator of the intended use of the carpet and, by extension, of the technique used and labour involved: details that would have had a bearing on the value of these commodities but that the authors of these documents would not have seen the need to specifically record. The official nature of many such documents might also explain the omission of qualitative descriptors.

79. The carpet in §579 is 13 hands long and is priced at 12 *muli* which amounts to 0.92 *muli* per *hasta*. According to §590, ‘Śāṃcā [...] arose and sold a woman called L̥yīpaae to the scribe Ramṣotsa’ for the price of ‘one viyala camel valued at forty, and a second aṃkla < tsa > camel valued at thirty,

one carpet twelve hands long, and a second carpet eleven hands long. Also received were eight sutra *muli*. The total price is ninety-eight. So they agreed on equal terms.’ This tells us that the price of the carpets, measuring a total of 23 *hasta*, jointly amounted to 20 *muli*. Therefore we may deduce that each *hasta* of carpet was worth about 0.87 *muli*, or roughly nine-tenths of a *muli*, on average. The latter calculation assumes that there was no particular distinction in value between the two carpets. It is unclear whether the average value we have arrived at represents a fixed rate or whether some amount of negotiation took place between the transacting parties on both occasions. As the documents do not record any such proceedings, it is difficult to judge what factors might have influenced the final value of these articles.

80. Interestingly, the transactions recorded in §579 and §590 are dated respectively in the 9th and 17th regnal years of the king Amgoka. It is from the 17th year of Amgoka’s reign that we receive the earliest confirmation of an event of considerable political significance that is believed to have placed Kroraina (at least nominally) under Chinese control. The Chinese seal affixed to §590 suggests increased Chinese influence even with regard to affairs of local concern at this western extreme of the kingdom.

See Brough, 'Comments on Third-Century Shan-Shan', 598-9. What effect the altered political status of Kroraina may have had upon the economic situation in Cadhota is difficult to tell, though.

81. Li Wenying, 'Textiles of the Second to Fifth Century', 254.

82. A coverlet, M3:24, recovered from the joint burial M3 discovered at Niya in 1995 was evidently made up from two pieces of the same Chinese silk brocade fabric joined together along the length. It survives intact and measures 94 cm × 168 cm. Zhao and Yu, *Legacy of the Desert King*, 72-3. Interestingly, these dimensions are quite similar to those of the woollen blankets just discussed. Thus, it seems that the silk fabric was received in the form of yardage and that it was later assembled locally into a coverlet.

83. Zhang He lists a 'diamonds and tiger' patterned specimen from Loulan L. E. As I have been unable at present to access any further details, it has not been possible for me to include this piece in this discussion. Zhang He, 'Figurative and Inscribed Carpets', 70.

84. The Yingpan specimen, 89M3:1, measures 90-100 cm × 260 cm while its counterpart from a gravesite near Loulan L. E. measures 103 cm × 266 cm. See Li Wenying, 'Textiles of the Second to Fifth Century', 256 and Yue

Feng, *Xinjiang lishi wenming jicui*, 150. I am indebted to Dr Zhang He for sharing with me the latter publication. Wu Min discusses another lion carpet from Yingpan, 89BYM1:12, which measures 95-100 cm × 260 cm. Wu Min, 'Study on Some Ancient Wool Fabrics', 15. It appears that these pieces, with their common subject matter and matching dimensions, belonged to a specific, rather standardised class of carpets that might have served a specific function. We might, perhaps, see these lion carpets as early representatives of an ancient tradition that has survived into the present day in the form of the tribal '*gabbeh-ye-shiri*' (lion-patterned *gabbeh* rugs) produced in the Fars province of Iran. See Parviz Tanavoli, *Lion Rugs: The Lion in the Art and Culture of Iran* (Basel: Wepf & Co., 1985).

85. Li Wenying, 'Textiles of the Second to Fifth Century', 256.

86. There are also references to carpets and rugs that may have originated outside Cadhota. See §633 for *kojava* and carpet bought from 'the mountain'. No fewer than three documents refer to 'Khotanese' *kojava* (§549, §583, §592) but this need not necessarily mean that such *kojava* were actually made in Khotan. We know that Cadhota received Khotanese refugees from time to time and these refugees

might have practiced a distinctively Khotanese style of rug weaving in their new home. A comparison of §222 and §549 suggests that there was no difference in price between an ordinary *kojava* and a Khotanese one. A comparison of the dimensions of some of the slightly later pieces from the looted site at Shanpula suggests that a standard width of about 116 cm to 119 cm had been established in the

region. For the dimensions of the five Shanpula carpets recovered in 2008, see Zhang He, 'Figurative and Inscribed Carpets', 59, 77-9.

87. Stein, *Serindia*, vol. 1, 372-3.

88. 'Even today the Mohammedans bring their dead for burial rolled in Kelims or felt carpets.' Bidder, *Carpets from Eastern Turkestan*, 82.

Out of the Shadows: The Façade and Decorative Sculpture of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Part 1

Melissa Hamnett, Curator, Sculpture, Victoria
and Albert Museum

Abstract

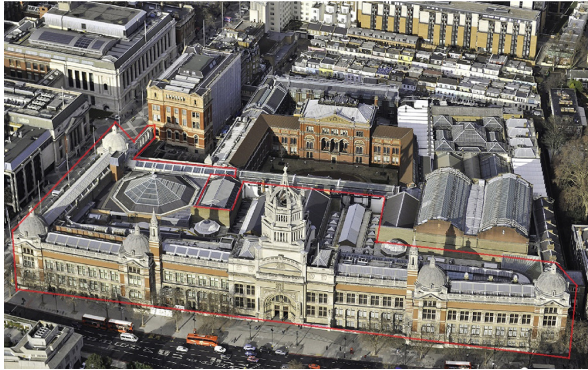


Figure 1 – Bird’s eye view of the Aston Webb extension, highlighting the full 12,120m² footprint of the site. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In 1909, the architect Sir Aston Webb completed a three-storey façade extension to the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 1). Built at a time of rising wealth and public patronage, coupled with unprecedented innovation across industries, the Webb wing – spanning a 12,120m² site – reflects the emergence of new civic centres with buildings that had greater input from pioneering contemporary sculptors. At a time when national pride and modernity were intersecting in prominent urban spaces through sculpture and

architecture, this first article (of three) summarises sculpture’s initial subordination to architecture, their growing symbiosis and the increasingly collaborative role that artists of the New Sculpture movement played in these emerging public buildings.

Introduction

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) was central in the development of modern British sculpture.¹ Founded in 1852 with profits from the 1851 Great Exhibition, the Museum emerged from wider debates in the 1830s and 1840s on British art and manufacture, coupled with a growing anxiety about the perceived superiority of French design.² While the institution’s early formation was an attempt to foster British self-confidence on the part of design reformers, manufacturers and politicians, its expanding site also highlights the changing rapport between architects and sculptors

that was to pave the way for a new sculptural aesthetic. Purposely built for the education and enjoyment of the public, and seen as a model for comparable institutions across Europe, the V&A's core aims were to make the fine and applied arts available to all, to educate working people and to inspire and teach British artists, designers and manufacturers.³

The building itself reflects these aims. Using new methods and materials, leading sculptors of the New Sculpture movement were employed to carve key British artistic figures in the niches of the two façades.⁴ Akin to a shop window celebrating British output, the sculptors of these carved figures also employed students from some of the leading London art schools as

apprentices, providing opportunities for creative and professional development. Underlining Britain's achievements in the fine and applied arts, the design and execution of the V&A's Aston Webb façade was a physical manifestation of the Museum's founding principles (an argument that will be examined in more detail in the second article).

Known as the Museum of Manufactures when it opened at Marlborough House in 1852, the institution was renamed the South Kensington Museum in 1857, when it moved to its current site on what was then the edge of west London. The name of this early building (belittlingly dubbed the Brompton Boilers by *The Illustrated London News* in 1857)⁵ remained so for more than four more decades until, in 1899, it was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁶ This event was marked by Queen Victoria (1819–1901), who laid the foundation stone for a new and imposing grand entrance designed by the architect, Sir Aston Webb (1849–1930) (figs 2 and 3).

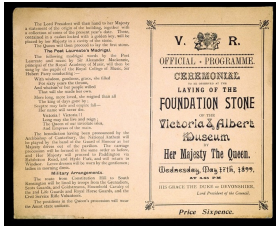


Figure 2 – Official programme for the laying of the Foundation Stone of the Victoria & Albert Museum, unknown maker, London, 1899, letterpress, blue ink on pink paper. Museum no. E.1458-1984. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

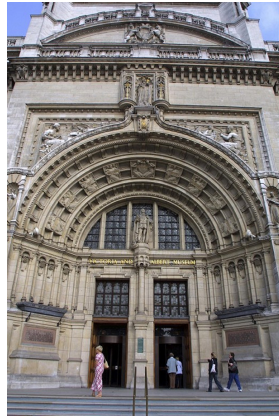


Figure 3 – Detail of the V&A's Grand Entrance doorway on Cromwell Road. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Aston Webb's design had won the 1891 competition administered by the Office of Works, who had invited eight architects to compete in a bid to unify the haphazard site of the South Kensington Museum at the end of the 19th century.⁷ The act of renaming the museum marked a triumphant and imperialist phase in the history of the V&A, expressed through Webb's entrance and façade, which was described by him in a 1909 guide as 'a great portal finished by an open lantern of the outline of an Imperial crown to mark the character of this great national

building'.⁸ A key feature of this vast redbrick and Portland stone façade is the elaborate sculptural scheme bridging Cromwell and Exhibition Road (fig. 4). A British Valhalla, it depicts 32 artistic personalities carved by 21 different sculptors. Those depicted include British painters, sculptors, architects and craftsmen who stand within niches between the first floor windows across the entire length of the façade. This is in addition to the arched entrance and central tower adorned with figures of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Conceived by Webb to be a vision for the modern museum, his sculpted façade signified the reinvention of Britain in a highly competitive Europe by embracing the spheres of fine and applied art, and articulating a new national consciousness.⁹ Accordingly, the architecture integrated traditional precedents, such as the standing niched personages, whose selection and execution was meant to highlight the joining of art and industry. The sculpture was not only a physical manifestation of skill and virtuosity, for the sculptors who carved it were

themselves also promoting a new collaboration between multiple professions in a bid to improve the infrastructure of education and patronage, which were to be vital for sculpture's success.¹⁰



Figure 4 – Black and white photo showing the corner of Exhibition Road and Cromwell Road and the sculpted figures in the second floor niches, Bolas & Co., South Kensington, London, 1909, albumen print. Museum no. E.1128-1989. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Despite sculpture's increasing public presence in Britain from the 1850s onwards, the V&A's elaborate façade attracts little attention today.¹¹ Indeed, if passers-by do not take

note of the carved figurative subjects, still less do they recognise their sculptural authors. Webb's extension united what had become a rather piecemeal and confusing complex of buildings by the 1880s, and highlights the associated shift in the relationship between sculpture and architecture. Not only did the building form part of South Kensington's budding new cultural and technology epicenter, known as Albertopolis,¹² but the sculptural scheme also articulated how craft and industry were increasingly considered interconnected spheres, with Britain and its empire triumphant symbols of economic and cultural change.¹³ Conveying narrative and meaning beyond its construction, the façade and its execution can accordingly be seen as a material expression of this wider emerging modernity.

This first article (of three) will provide the wider background to the changing alliance between sculpture and architecture, with particular reference to Webb's V&A façade, by considering the broader changes taking place in sculpture's

production, location and consumption from the 1850s onwards. This will be examined in part through studying the population shift from rural to urban areas in the early 19th century, and the impact after 1850 of Britain's inhabitants increasingly becoming city dwellers. It will consider how these changes affected the relationship between sculpture and architecture from the 1870s onwards, resulting in a new set of parameters for sculptural practice in Britain led by practitioners of the New Sculpture, by whom at least 17 of the V&A's niched figures and all the main entrance work was carried out.¹⁴ The

second article will look in detail at how the prevailing desire to find a modern idiom for three-dimensional sculpture was played out in the design and execution of the Webb building, and how it supported the broader context of the institution's founding ethos. I will particularly focus on how the sculptors who collaborated on the façade actively sought out new connections between sculptural representation and its immediate historical context.

Essential to sculpture's changing ideology and Webb's V&A façade was the New Sculpture, whose practitioners changed how sculpture was being seen and encountered in the late 19th century.

They dominated the rise of what is known as Edwardian Baroque architecture,¹⁵ a term that refers to the architectural style of public buildings built in Britain during the Edwardian era (1901–10), many of which unify art and industry with pedagogy. Given this link, the role of the New Sculpture in the V&A façade will also be considered within the wider prevailing ideologies of art, design and education. My third and final article will examine how this paradigm shift in sculpture affected its role in both public and private contexts in the early 20th century. By examining changes in how sculpture

was being made and understood, it will explore the wider output of the New Sculpture, and how the changing identity of the sculptors who worked on the façade accordingly affected subsequent artists and sculptural practice.

Urban growth and the alliance of sculpture and architecture

The emerging market for the dissemination of, and education in, good design depended on the

development of a wealthier middle class who consumed these goods at home, in public and through museum or gallery environments.¹⁶ This transition had, in part, come about through a major shift in the balance between Britain's rural and urban population. It not only saw fundamental changes occur within major cities and towns where sculpture increasingly played a part, but also in the relationship of urban spaces to British society as a whole.¹⁷ The growth of the administrative county of London in particular was rapid in both geographical area and population numbers, rising from

3,000,000 in 1860 to 4,500,000 by 1900. Greater London grew faster still, and between 1871 and 1891 it expanded more quickly than the national population as a whole.¹⁸ As cities in Britain were redesigned due to the shifting urban demographic, and the growing middle classes concurrently became wealthier, the market for art expanded exponentially. With regards to sculpture, this had an impact on production, location and display. The state commissioned sculpture for new buildings and public squares, provincial towns bought it through subscription and

philanthropy, and technical innovations in casting and reproductions saw a new group of dealers selling it to museums and collectors.¹⁹

In southwest London specifically, the embryonic South Kensington Museum, with its medley of temporary buildings and growing collections, was in need of rationalisation; old brick houses occupied the southeast corner of the estate, wooden sheds that had moved from Marlborough House were covered in corrugated iron for the Schools of Design, and brick galleries in a north Italian Renaissance style had been chosen for the lecture theatre and paintings galleries. Refreshment rooms, storehouses, and various other structures, all of a provisional and economical kind, accordingly gave the grounds of the museum a divided and miscellaneous character.²⁰

Aston Webb's extension marked the V&A's development from a 'Museum of Manufactures' to an institution

that actively promoted the alliance between art, craft and industry. This was not only reflected in the Museum's increasingly diverse holdings but also through its cohesive and sculpted façade. While the carved personages on the Webb exterior show homage to both the fine and applied arts, the sculptors who carved them were likewise not just confined to statuary but gradually also embellished products ranging from domestic goods such as decorative ornaments, to street furniture such as lampposts and fountains.²¹



Figure 5 – City Square Leeds, photograph, unknown photographer, Leeds, 1905. © Leeds Library & Information Services

While this was happening in Britain, parallels can be similarly drawn with other European cities, such as Paris, Barcelona and Amsterdam, albeit slightly later. These developments

were sometimes accentuated by the late 19th and early 20th century World Fairs, where the growing prominence of sculpture was in part led by these international exhibitions and where new technical innovations in sculpture were often exhibited.²² However, sculpture's ubiquity was also a consequence of the mounting need for town planners to bring order to the unprecedented urban growth. In Britain, city streets were gradually populated with civic buildings and communal squares, which were felt to need embellishment to give them a greater sense of identity (fig. 5).²³ While

the Church continued to commission sculpture of this period (as was historically the case), the Government notably became its new chief patron with civic centres, such as London, Liverpool, and Glasgow, dominating production.²⁴ As a result, professional sculptors were increasingly employed to provide focused definition in the form of memorial statues, carved decoration and fountain displays, in a bid to enhance the new spaces made possible by municipal planning.²⁵

Initially, civic sculpture was produced under the auspices of commissioning committees with professional organisations, such as the Royal Academy,²⁶ and

educational establishments, such as the Glasgow School of Art,²⁷ involved in adjudicating competitions. It was through such tradition and training that contemporary sculptors met the expectations and values of the institutions endorsing them as professional. This is particularly evident from the 1850s onwards, when sculpture was added to the exteriors of law courts, theatres, libraries and banks, as new seats of government, culture, learning and commerce called for new buildings and headquarters.²⁸ The chain of command often involved large teams of anonymous sculptors

working on surface decoration, rather than independent sculpted works being integrated into the whole. This can be seen in the decorative scheme for the former Bank of West England and Wales (fig. 6), built between 1854 and 1858, where over 20 sculptors were employed at the close of the building project to add decorative friezes, designed solely by the architects.²⁹ Showing similar traits (prior to its bombing in 1940), was the Carlton Club in London's Pall Mall. Built between 1854 and 1856 by Sydney Smirke (1798–1877), the decorative frieze at the top of the building is seemingly incongruous with the rest

of the Venetian
Renaissance-style
façade.³⁰



Figure 6 – An unsigned print of the decorative scheme for the former West of England and South Wales District Bank, Bristol. Illustrated London News, August 9, 1856, issue 815, 136. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Early examples, such as this, highlight how sculpture was still divorced from the architectural whole, considered all too late in the building's scheme, and habitually manifested as a last minute appendage. With no serious consideration, sculptural decoration acted simply as a filter to the architecture, its authors, position

and function deemed secondary. This was exacerbated by practitioners of Gothic Revival architecture, such as George Scott (1811–78), who designed the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras (1868–76) (fig. 7) or Charles Barry (1795–1860) and Augustus Pugin (1812–52), who were responsible for rebuilding the Palace of Westminster (1840–60). In both instances, the exterior sculpted decoration was treated more as 'common architectural ornament', rather than as works of art in their own right and, while not of poor quality, was applied with no real sense of harmony.³¹ Moreover, it was carried out by large teams of unknown architectural carvers who executed the architects' vision from arms' length, rather than by sculptors who collaborated with the architect to self-consciously define their work and the function of the building. In combination, these factors undermined artistic autonomy and artisanal practice on an individual level.³²



Figure 7 – The Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras, London © CC.BY-SA.3.0

As London's civic map continued to grow throughout the 1860s and 1870s, sculpture's frequent divorce from, and secondary position to, architecture became increasingly marked. This was highlighted in an 1861 essay entitled *British Sculpture: Its Condition and Prospects*, by William Rossetti (1829–1919), the younger brother of the Pre-Raphaelite painter. Rossetti argued that 'if sculptors could only learn how to invest their work with expression and character and bring it out of the exhibition gallery into the bustling city streets, public interest would be aroused again'.³³ While his comments highlight the gulf that existed between architectural carving, modelling and

'high art', they also (perhaps unfairly) implicitly blame the sculptor, who was often in fact carrying out the wider vision and design scheme of the architect.

Serious consideration of sculpture and its civic role resurfaced in the *British Architect* in April 1874, a journal that had first appeared in January of that year and remained a determined champion of sculpture's cause for the rest of the century.³⁴ The view that architectural decoration was somehow unworthy of consideration as art was seen to be the result of an enforced separation between 'the sculptor proper' and 'commercial or architectural carvers', the latter largely associated with specific large workshops such as Farmer and Brindley.³⁵ This separation of the conceptual side of sculpture (the work of the imagination) from the manual side of sculpture (the actual physical making) meant that contemporary commentators and architects thought it almost impossible for 'the sculptor proper' to embellish cohesively public buildings.³⁶ Critics who tended only

to accept memorials or gallery sculpture as genuine works of art further compounded this view. Notable comparisons can be drawn here with European buildings such as Paris's Hotel de Ville, built between 1873 and 1892, where 230 sculptors – amongst them Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) – worked on individual figures that were subordinated to the overall façade scheme, while the practitioners remained largely unknown and unacknowledged.³⁷ Likewise, the sculpture on Stockholm's 1908 Royal Dramatic Theatre is frequently overlooked, despite the involvement of renowned Swedish

sculptors such as Herman Neujd (1872–1931) and Carl Milles (1875–1955), the latter a former assistant to Rodin.³⁸



Figure 8 – Athlete Wrestling a Python, Frederick Leighton, 1877, as displayed in the V&A's Dorothy and Michael Hinzte Sculpture galleries in 2007. Loan from Tate, museum no. N01754. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The idea that figurative sculpture as applied decoration could be considered as art, enhancing the new urban environment, and yet

divorced from any commemorative role, was radical in 1870s Britain. Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830–96), better known as a painter, was amongst the first to try to formulate a new direction for sculpture and, while not conceived for an architectural setting, his acclaimed *Athlete Wrestling a Python* of 1877 (fig. 8) sought to elevate sculpture from its subordination to painting through the dynamic representation of the human body. Leighton's piece was seen as a catalyst for the emerging New Sculpture movement, capturing the genre's expressive and naturalistic possibilities with its

vigorous depiction of a muscular figure braced in struggle with a huge coiling serpent.³⁹ Retrospectively coining the term, 'The New Sculpture' in his seminal 1894 *Art Journal* essays, the art critic Edmund Gosse saw Leighton's *Athlete* as epitomising a sculptural reawakening through its truth to nature and re-evaluation of sculptural composition.⁴⁰ But, while Leighton's work certainly threw into question the conventional format and context of the freestanding ideal statue (epitomised by practitioners of Neoclassicism), it was seven years before interest in blending sculpture and architecture

into a more sympathetic whole began to intensify.⁴¹

The Arts and Crafts movement undoubtedly played a part in enabling architects to associate more with artists and sculptors, as the foundation of guilds and societies encouraged a reaffirmation of art's relevance in society through collaborations with industry and commerce.⁴² This was reinforced by the need to forge a new national identity to compete in international markets, endorsed by government-sponsored patronage that ruptured old systems of production. For architecture, this resulted in the displacement of the 'aggressive and assertive Gothic Revival style, in favour of a more rational and technological spirit, epitomised by the Edwardian Baroque'.⁴³ It essentially combined ebullient classical features, such as heavy rustication and weighty ground floor arches, with British imperial elements like turrets, heraldry and domes, facetiously termed 'Wrenaissance' after Sir Christopher Wren.⁴⁴ This was typically finished

with expressive allegorical and figurative sculpture, which was comprehensively integrated, the parts all belonging to the whole yet clearly individually considered.⁴⁵

A key point in the advent of Edwardian Baroque was in 1884 when John Belcher (1841–1913), one of the leading architects of the period, founded the Art Workers' Guild with Hamo Thornycroft (1850–1925), a young practitioner in the New Sculpture movement.⁴⁶ The Art Workers' Guild pledged to unite the aesthetic arts in Britain through constructive dialogue between artists and artisans, and vowed to establish a more modern dialogue between architects and sculptors.⁴⁷ This accorded with the growing need for large-scale city buildings from architects whose modernity was increasingly judged by their interest in collaboration.⁴⁸ As Europe's thriving industrial economies were churning out new machines and products, hundreds of thousands of people were being drawn into its cities with the promise of prosperity and excitement. In an age of

extraordinary progress where architects, sculptors and designers were ushering in a new period of urban change, experimentation went hand in hand with collaboration as the idea of art in a public context, and cross-disciplinary approaches to building, were gradually perceived as enhancing the urban environment.⁴⁹ The diversity and interconnectedness of sculptural practice provided architects with new ideas and processes that departed from their normal approach, while sculptors were likewise reassessing their approach to materials so that their contributions could more

effectively take a place in the façade as a whole.⁵⁰ Sculpture, it was felt, should no longer be simply added on to a building like an ill-thought addendum, but jointly considered by the architect and the sculptor from the beginning. In his *Essentials in Architecture*, Belcher advocated the considered cohesion of sculpture from the start as a fundamental part of any edifice, ‘Whatever be the purpose of a building, there should be no feature, ornament or line, which has not a definite end or meaning or which is not an integral part of the architectural scheme from the start.’⁵¹ He went on to add that ‘the artistic element must

neither override the practical or the scientific, nor yet be superimposed upon it, but must work with it. The two aspects [...] are so blended that though they may be distinguished in thought, they cannot be separated in operation'.⁵²



Figure 9 – The external façade of London's Institute of Chartered Accountants. © Melissa Hamnett, 2013

By the late 1880s, the promotion of integrating art and industry was receiving considerable attention and, in 1888, the first national congress of the Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry was held in Liverpool.⁵³ The congress was presided over by Lord Leighton – a keen supporter of technical and stylistic innovation in sculpture – and chaired by Alfred Gilbert (1854–1934), a New Sculptor and close associate of Thornycroft.⁵⁴ The focus of the day was how to reconcile the methodology and design ideology of the Arts and Crafts with a new architectural style that could communicate those ideas in a fresh and culturally invigorating way. Belcher's contribution to the congress was a paper directed against the stylistic conventions of previous decades, which called for all architects to treat the work of sculpture 'as a jewel whose beauty is to be enhanced by an appropriate setting'.⁵⁵ He cautioned against adding applied ornament at the end of a building project for the sake of simply varying texture, profile or silhouette. Instead he advocated the

use of figurative sculpture and fresco work to provide unity.

Belcher's paper raised pertinent points related to his own work, since he was just embarking on the design for London's Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1888 (fig. 9), a twin project with his fellow Guild founder, Thornycroft. The building was pioneering in terms of its formal innovation and forward-looking design and, thanks to Belcher's and Thornycroft's belief in the unity of all arts, it physically manifested the prevailing values of design reformers like Sir Henry Cole (1802–92), to modernise industry by contesting its false separation from art.⁵⁶ Belcher and Thornycroft captured these values through a series of carved relief panels representing 'arts', 'science', 'craft', 'commerce' and 'education', coupled with figurative sculpture on the rusticated Portland stone masonry. The cohesion of the sculpture on the building's façade not only testified to a new partnership between architect and sculptor, it also reflected belief that

the union of art, education and commerce had the power to boost the empire and transform society. This view was heavily promoted by Cole, a central figure in British art and design education whilst Director of the South Kensington Museum from 1857–73. Cole disseminated these beliefs via the National Art Training Schools, which he was instrumental in developing, and from which other art schools such as Brighton, Glasgow and Birmingham took their lead.⁵⁷



Figure 10 – The external façade of Lloyd's Shipping Register building. © Melissa Hamnett, 2013

On the building's completion in 1893, it was reported in *The Times* that, 'one would give whole streets full of frippery for a building designed with

the courage and sincerity of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, whose modernity has the power to lift one's experience of the street, one's experience of it and even the nation as a whole'.⁵⁸ Echoing this scheme, and arriving not long after it in 1900, was another London building known as the Lloyd's Shipping Register (fig. 10). Here, George Frampton (1860–1928), a New Sculptor and Master of the Art Worker's Guild, collaborated with the architect Thomas Edward Collcutt (1840–1924) on the naturalistic allegorical frieze reliefs depicting Virtue and Industry.⁵⁹ It is significant that in 1891,

when the Treasury and Office of Works invited eight architects to submit design entries for a new V&A façade, both Belcher and Collcutt were amongst those asked to participate alongside Aston Webb, who ultimately won the commission.⁶⁰



Figure 11 – Detail of Amsterdam's Beurs van Berlage (Stock Exchange building). © Melissa Hamnett, 2013

As architectural and sculptural collaborations became increasingly widespread towards the end of the 19th century, European cities similarly reflected this trend, as their cityscapes expanded and civic buildings were embellished. The Netherlands in particular embraced

these new partnerships, exemplified by Amsterdam's Beurs van Berlage (Stock Exchange building). Built between 1896 and 1903 by the architect, Hendrick Petrus Berlage, and the sculptor Lambertus Zijl, the collaboration can be seen through the frieze panels and poetic verses on the façade (fig. 11), the latter echoing the architect's wish for the building and its reliefs to be seen as one.⁶¹ In France, the façade likewise became an increasingly important place where the sculptor could be actively involved in the edifice, illustrated by the Théâtre des Champs Élysées, where Émile-Antoine Bourdelle worked

alongside the architects van de Velde and Perret.⁶² Traditionally most British sculptors were trained to work under the supervision of architects, but following Thornycroft's lead in Britain on the Institute of Chartered Accountants, a precedent had been set for redressing the balance of future collaborations and bringing sculpture into alliance with architecture.⁶³

The new explorations in the 1880s supported and enabled a transformation in the practice, theory and reception of sculpture, and saw certain architects increasingly predisposed towards giving sculptors a more defining role in the early 20th century. Aston Webb, like Belcher, was one such architect that I will explore in more

detail in the second article, which focuses in depth on the V&A's façade sculpture and sculptors. Aside from the sense of a new national consciousness merging with nascent concepts of modernism, it will become clear on investigating the façade that practitioners of the New Sculpture moved away from the static appearance of 19th-century neoclassical figures towards an 'interplay between the physical presence of the statue and the figural representation it conveys'.⁶⁴ Such explorations were only possible due to a period of shifting urban and economic growth, the changing relationship

between architect and sculptor, and the complex interconnections between government-sponsored building, education and culture. As the need to compete in international industrial markets became more pronounced, culture became the way in which national identity was articulated by the end of the 19th century, particularly for the middle classes.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the transformation of art institutions (and the establishment of new ones) also led to wider changes in educational approach that affected architects, sculptors and the public. This will, likewise, be discussed in more depth in my second

article, set within the specific context of the V&A's founding objectives.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. I will use the term V&A to refer to the South Kensington Museum despite its not formally being named the Victoria and Albert Museum until 1899.
2. William Ewart, *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures: Together with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons Papers, 1835). See also William Ewart, *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connection with Manufactures; with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London: House of Commons Papers, 1836). A Government School of Design was chartered a few months after the Committee was adjourned in 1836 and founded at Somerset House in 1837, followed by Prince Albert becoming the President of the Society of Arts in 1843, founded in 1754 'for the Encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce'.
3. Julius Bryant, *Art and Design for All* (London: V&A, 2012), 9. The Museum was set up in large part with the help of Prince Albert and Henry Cole who were keen to demonstrate Britain's industrial and commercial supremacy and to propagate improvements in the quality of British Design.

4. John Physick, *The Victoria & Albert Museum: The History of Its Building* (London: V&A, 1982), 274–6.
5. *The Illustrated London News*, 27 June, 1857. The newspaper dubbed the temporary structure of The South Kensington Museum ‘the Brompton Boilers’ in response to a reference in *The Builder*, 16 April, 1956 that described the structure’s corrugated iron roofs as ‘a threefold monster boiler’.
6. Malcom Baker and Brenda Richardson, *A Grand Design* (London: V&A, 1998), 13. The Museum of Manufactures was founded at Marlborough House in 1852, renamed the Museum of Ornamental Art in 1853, opened as the South Kensington Museum in 1857 and finally named the V&A in 1899.
7. Physick, *The Victoria & Albert Museum*, 183–200. Webb’s design was modified in the light of finances, practical necessity and changing demands from the Department of Science and Art.
8. Aston Webb, *Guide to the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1909), 6.
9. Eoin Martin, ‘Framing Victoria: Royal Portraiture and Architectural Sculpture in Victorian Britain’, *Sculpture Journal* 23. 2 (2014): 197–207.
10. Martina Droth, Jason Edwards and Michael Hatt, eds, *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention 1837–1901* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 15–20.
11. For a detailed look at the range and proliferation of historic sculpture in Britain see The National Recording Project Series, *Public Sculpture of Britain*, published by Liverpool University Press. In relation to the City of London specifically see Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of the City of London* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003). See also Elizabeth Susan Darby, ‘Statues of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert: A Study in Commemorative and Portrait Statuary, 1837–1924’ (PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1983).
12. The intellectual concept of Albertopolis derived from Prince Albert’s vision to build a complex in South Kensington, which would keep Britain at the peak of industrial world power specialising in art and science. It began with the ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’ in 1851, which yielded unpredicted profits of over £180,000 and continued with Albert’s belief that this should be spent on purchasing land

within South Kensington for cultural and educational use.

13. Tori Smith, “A Grand Work of Noble Conception”: The Victoria Memorial and Imperial London’ in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, ed. by David Gilbert and Felix Driver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 21–39.
14. Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (London: Yale University Press, 1983). As with all designations of movements, the New Sculpture label is used throughout my articles with a note of caution. Although it characterises the changing climate of sculpture in Victorian Britain, the term sometimes fails to capture the naturally diverse practice of its advocates, whose common aim was to reconsider the physical and material properties of the sculpted object.
15. Richard Fellows, *Edwardian Architecture: Style and Technology* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 1995) and Alastair Service, *Edwardian Architecture and Its Origins* (London: Architectural Press, 1975). The term Edwardian Baroque is considered a particularly retrospective period of British architectural history, since it is contemporary with what was arguably a more forward-looking style, Art Nouveau. However, it was the bridging style that helped see in modernism.
16. Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (London: Yale University Press, 2006). Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (London: V&A, 2010), 94. Galleries such as the Fine Art Society, established in 1876, were catering to the upper end of this new market.
17. Robert J. Morris and Richard Rodger, eds, *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History, 1830–1914* (London: Longman, 1993). See also Nancy Rose Marshall, *City of Gold and Mud: Painting Victorian London* (London: Yale University Press, 2012).
18. Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: University of California Press, 1963), 324–5. See also Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Yale University Press, 2000).
19. Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City 1840–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
20. F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., ‘Victoria and Albert Museum’, in *Survey of London:*

- Volume 38, South Kensington Museums Area* (London: London County Council, 1975), 97–102.
21. Barbara Bryant, *Two Temple Place: A Perfect Gem of Late Victorian Art, Architecture and Design* (London: Bulldog Trust, 2013), 37–9.
 22. Yves Koopmans, *Fixed and Chiselled: Sculpture in Architecture 1840–1940* (Rotterdam: NA1 Uitgevers, 1994) and Karen Lang, ‘Monumental Unease: Monuments and the Making of National Identity in Germany’, in *Imagining Modern German Culture 1889–1910*, ed. by Françoise Foster-Hahn, *Studies in the History of Art*, no. 53, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 275–99.
 23. Penelope Curtis, *Sculpture 1900–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.
 24. See The National Recording Project Series, *Public Sculpture of Britain* published by Liverpool University Press, notably: Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of Historic Westminster: Volume 1* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); Ray McKenzie, *Public Sculpture of Glasgow* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002); Terry Cavanagh, *Public Sculpture of Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).
 25. Curtis, *Sculpture 1900–1945*, 5–9.
 26. Sidney Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768–1968* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1968). The Royal Academy of Arts was founded in 1768 with a mission to cultivate and improve the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture in Britain through education and exhibition.
 27. University of Glasgow History of Art and HATII, ‘“The Glasgow School of Art”: Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain & Ireland 1851–1951’, [online database 2011](#)
 28. [See the National Recording Project for the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association \(PMSA\)](#)
 29. [Gary Nisbet, ‘John Thomas \(1813–1862\)’, Glasgow - City of Sculpture](#). W. B. Gingell and T. R. Lysaght were the building’s architects and the sculptor John Thomas (1813–62) was the supervising carver employed to oversee the bank’s decoration. His large workshop of architectural sculptors carried out the work. The adornment was intended to emphasise the wealth, and therefore financial stability, of the bank, which in fact collapsed 20 years later in 1878. See also The Army and Navy Club in London’s Pall Mall, built in 1850 from the designs of Parnell and Smith.

30. F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London: Volumes 29 and 30: St James Westminster, Part 1* (London: London County Council, 1960), 180–86, [available online](#). For an illustration of the Carlton Club prior to its wartime destruction, see [The Dictionary of Victorian London](#). Another similar London example is The Army and Navy Club, built in Pall Mall in 1850 by Parnell and Smith.
31. *British Architect*, Friday 17 April, 1. 16 (1874): 241.
32. Droth, Edwards and Hatt, eds, *Sculpture Victorious*, 12–13.
33. William Rossetti, ‘British Sculpture: Its Condition and Prospects’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, 63 (1861): 493–505.
34. *British Architect*, Friday 17 April, 1. 16 (1874): 241.
35. Ann Compton, ‘“Art Workers”’: Education and Professional Advancement in Sculpture and the Stone Trades c.1850–1900’, *Sculpture Journal*, 21. 2 (2012), 119–30.
36. Martina Droth, ‘The Ethics of Making: Craft and English Sculptural Aesthetics c.1851–1900’, *Journal of Design History* 17]: 3 (2004): 223–4.
37. Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Rodin was one of the unidentified sculptors who worked on the Hotel de Ville.
38. Carl Milles, *Episodes from my Life* (Stockholm: Ehrenblad Editions, 1991). These anecdotes tell of Milles’s struggles for recognition, and his work and years in Paris, America and Italy.
39. David Getsy, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877–1905* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 2.
40. Edmund Gosse, ‘The New Sculpture: 1879–1894’, *Art Journal* 56 (1894): 138–42, 199–203, 277–82, 306–11.
41. Hermione Hobhouse, ed., ‘Architectural sculpture and decorative treatment’, in *Survey of London Monograph 17* (London: County Hall, 1991), 57–69.
42. Michael Brooks, *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1936), 299–313. The Art Workers’ Guild for example, included many of the best artists and architects of the time who wished to establish new links between art and life.
43. Fellows, *Edwardian Architecture*, 7.
44. Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3: North West* (London: Penguin, 1991), 495.

45. Robert Macleod, *Style and Society: Architectural Ideology in Britain 1835–1914* (London: Riba Enterprises, 1971).
46. Fellows, *Edwardian Architecture*, 13–15.
47. Lara Platman, *Art Workers Guild 125 Years: Craftspeople at Work Today* (London: Unicorn Press, 2009). See also: [Art Worker's Guild](#)
48. Curtis, *Sculpture 1900–1945*, 19.
49. P. Rathbone, 'Architecture as a Necessary Element in National Economy' (paper read to the Liverpool Architectural Society, 3 December 1894).
50. *R.I.B.A Journal*, 1 (1893): 4–6.
51. John Belcher, *Essentials in Architecture: An Analysis of the Principles and Qualities to be looked for in Buildings* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1907), 45.
52. Belcher, *Essentials in Architecture*, 7.
53. Christopher Crouch, *Design Culture in Liverpool, 1880–1914: The Origins of the Liverpool School* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 69.
54. Crouch, *Design Culture in Liverpool*, 70.
55. Terry Friedman et al, *The Alliance of Sculpture and Architecture: Hamo Thornycroft, John Belcher and the Institute of the Chartered Accountants Building* (Leeds: Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, 1993), 5.
56. Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave, eds, *The Journal of Design and Manufactures*, vols 1–6 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849–52). Six volumes of the journal were published between 1849 and 1852. Its main aim was to call for a greater co-operation between art and industry, encouraging designers to reach a balance between utility and ornament. Written at a time when standards in Victorian design were disappointing, especially in mass manufactured machine products, the journal is a manifestation of the period's wider concern about the relationship between decoration and function. This was also being witnessed abroad slightly earlier in France. See Claire Jones, *Sculptors and Design Reform in France, 1848 to 1895* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014).
57. For a brief contemporary survey of Academies, Schools, and Galleries in the Victorian era see 'Victorian Art Institutions: A Contemporary Survey of Academies, Schools, and Galleries', [Victorian Web](#). For specific references see Jonathan M Woodham, '[Brighton School of Art - the Victorian age to the twentieth century](#)', [University of Brighton Faculty of Arts](#). Cole was far more than an educational bureaucrat, having been a Royal Society of Arts

- design prize-winner and a moving force behind the Great Exhibition of All Nations held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851.
58. *The Times*, 10 May, 1893: 23.
59. For the history of Lloyd's Shipping Register and George Frampton's role on the building designed by Thomas Collcutt see 'Lloyd's Register in London: The Collcutt and Rogers Buildings', ed. by Kathy Davis, *Lloyds Register Group Services*
60. Sheppard, 'Victoria and Albert Museum', 118.
61. Pieter Singelenberg, *H.P. Berlage Idea and Style: The Quest for Modern Architecture* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1972). The same two artists had previously collaborated in 1895 on the Netherlands Insurance Company at The Hague.
62. Denise Basdevant, *Bourdelle et le Theatre des Champs-Elysees* (Paris: Hachette, 1982).
63. Curtis, *Sculpture 1900-1945*, 14.
64. Getsy, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain*, 1.
65. Alexandra Ward, 'Archeology, Heritage and Identity: The Creation and Development of a National Museum in Wales', (Michigan: ProQuest, 2008), 13-19. Ward's published PhD thesis examines 19th-century museums as cultural producers. Albeit slightly later in the period see also: Catherine Moriarty, 'Joseph Emberton: The Architecture of Display', *Palant House Magazine* 34 (2015).

Gestures, Ritual & Play: Interview with Liam O'Connor

Lina Hakim, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum

Introduction

Abstract

Liam O'Connor, Drawing Resident at the V&A (April 2014-April 2015), discusses his work on the Exhibition Road building site in an interview with Lina Hakim, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Museum.



Figure 1 - Liam O'Connor's drawing scroll mounted on an easel with rollers custom-built for work on the Exhibition Road building site. © Liam O'Connor

Liam O'Connor was Drawing Resident at the V&A from April 2014 to April 2015, taking up the first of a series of artists' residencies focusing on the Exhibition Road Building Project. In this interview, recorded in his studio on Thursday 2 April 2015, as his stay at the Museum was drawing to a close, Liam reflects on his experience and on the work he has produced. As Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow on the V&A Research Institute (VARI) Pilot Project, I investigate models of object-focused inquiry – in particular, the range of practices that constitute research in the context of a museum

collection. I was struck by Liam's work, which I think of as an exceptionally generative approach to practice-based research. During our overlapping time at the Museum, Liam and I had several conversations about his practice, processes and objects, and discussed their underlying themes in which we share an interest – namely: gesture, ritual, craft and play. This interview attempts to encapsulate our many discussions in order to share the thinking and making behind the work.

The most prominent output from Liam's residency is a 13-metre-long drawing scroll (fig. 1) documenting the building work and capturing the performance and rituals of the

people working on the building site.¹ It is the starting point of our conversation, as Liam explains how the scroll format allowed him to both retain a spontaneous feel to the sketches drawn in-situ (fig. 2) and to build up a sense of sequence in a single piece to reflect on what takes place on the construction site.

Drawing Rituals



Figure 2 – Liam O’Connor working on the scroll at the building site. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Liam O’Connor: I think what’s nice about it as a device is that you just add to it... in a very small way each time. But then when you unroll it like I have done in the last few weeks, it’s actually quite a grand drawing but it was never made with that intention. And so that kind of mirrors that whole idea, doesn’t it, that you get this grand gesture that’s placed in a building but it’s all made on lots of very small moments... lots of millions of thoughts and decisions and misunderstandings and gestures and all sorts of stuff so... You know it’s all kind of in there and none them takes dominance, they’re all kind of equal in this drawing really...

Having previously worked on building sites, Liam is struck by the time and emotion invested in this

space by the people working there, and by how, once the building is complete, all evidence of their presence and of all their movements and effort is swept aside. One of the things he sought to capture during his residency is the sense of how ‘the building is quite a grand statement, but it’s actually built on tons and tons of tiny gestures’.² The scroll functions as a record these gestures, and Liam explains how the act of drawing it provided him with what he describes as a ‘spine’ for his residency. Watch a time-lapse of Liam in action [here](#).

Liam O’Connor: It gave me a similar thing to work on, where it was a kind of ritual each week coming in and

changing it... when you’re struggling for ideas or whatever, it’s kind of nice to have this thing which is kind of a constant thing you can just do to forget about stuff as you’re drawing and as soon as you start drawing... you kind of forget about the stress of having to do something or make some work or...

Lina Hakim: Or decide?

Liam O’Connor: Or make decisions yeah.

Lina Hakim: So you have your ritual that’s part of recording a ritual...

Liam O’Connor: Yeah, yeah. I mean... drawing is quite good because it’s really straightforward and if I spend an hour working on that I feel like I’ve achieved something...

Lina Hakim: Like you’ve put in your hours!

Liam O’Connor: Yes, you’ve put in your time and there’s something to show for it rather than all the things going round in your head.

Lina Hakim: Time is another thing we can talk about, because it’s a

particular issue with the practising artist, your relationship to time... it's about articulating this time and structuring it and then...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah I think time is interesting because if you (as an artist) didn't do anything, I don't know whether anyone would actually notice... so when you've got nothing specific to do, you either don't turn up any more and you go off and do something else, or you start to build little rituals for yourself to pass the time and to make sense of it. And drawing is one of them, and to go outside and play about with the clay and the concrete and try and work out ways of making sense of what's going on out there (on the building site) or how you can use it to make some work or explain what you've discovered out there.

Lina Hakim: So how did you branch out from drawing to the other things? When did you start playing with the clay and the concrete?

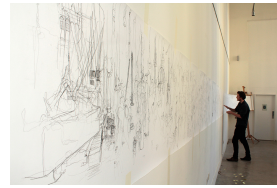


Figure 3a – Liam O'Connor describing details from the unrolled scroll in his studio. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 3b – Detail from the drawing scroll showing Liam's sketches of the builder performing the slump test. © Liam O'Connor

Liam O'Connor: It's the observation I guess. I was drawing the guy who's carrying the bucket of concrete (fig. 3). I kept drawing him all the time because he had this posture where he's trying to counterbalance this heavy object he's carrying and that's what... say compared to drawing people in the street or sat in a café... there are quite exaggerated gestures and body positions on the site which you don't see elsewhere. And so that's what's interesting about drawing the people on it, it's all these positions they take up... And the guy was carrying this big bucket of concrete. So I drew him and redrew him and kept drawing him over and over, trying to draw him as simply as possible to convey that

sense of weight and movement... And that led me to talking to him on the site and telling him that I was drawing him and showing him the drawing and then getting him to explain what it was he was actually doing with that concrete. So without having drawn him I don't know whether it would have been as interesting... I think drawing helps to establish things in your head because you kind of have a reference to what it is that was interesting to you because you remember making the drawing and then you have the drawing itself so...

Lina Hakim: You also look at it differently don't you? It concentrates your attention...

Liam O'Connor: Yes it does. Definitely... it makes you question what's going on, it makes you kind of work out... One of the drawings I can't capture is one of the lorry driver jumping in and out of his cab. I can get him climbing up and down, but I can't get the twist and shift to the side that he does to get in and out of his seat. If you were just watching that, you wouldn't think about it probably that much but because you're trying to draw it, it's just like why can't I see that? Because I understand what he's doing but I can't capture it! I can't work it out and he does it so quickly that you can't... so it makes you obsessed about very little things that are completely unnecessary but sometimes lead to other pieces of work so...

Lina Hakim: Focusing on this tiny detail, I think, fits with your overall approach to these tiny gestures, to the subtle incremental things that make up flow...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, I like tiny things and I like tiny gestures. I think it's the routine and ritual and

repetition... It's what everyone does and has an understanding of... and they (the builders) have their own versions of doing various things that, to look at, are quite beautiful. Especially if they're repeated over and over again... and that people do them without thinking. I guess that's the other thing about the guy jumping out of his cab is that it's not a thought in his head, it's just an intuitive thing... you know when you climb into the lorry it's kind of... I remember at the British Museum I'd jump in the lorries a few times to do a particular piece of work, and it is quite difficult to understand how you get into them, but then

you get people who just get up and down really quickly and I like that... that kind of muscle memory that people have... this range of movements.³ And out there, in that particular space, they don't really go outside a certain range of movements. Particular people have particular ways of moving around out there and they're stuck within these repeated patterns and that's quite nice to watch or try and draw.

Lina Hakim: The other thing that you kept talking about is the weight of that bucket. This idea of effort and strength contrasted with this idea of facility in these very specific movements...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah I think I like the energy... I like that sort of transfer of

energy between a space and the people in it. Like this room, here (gesturing at the studio space that we're in), is finished, but a lot of energy from people went into it, into its surfaces... I like thinking about the memory of that, and then that space has fed into them as well, so it goes both ways. I guess that's what I like about looking at their movement around the site rather than the space itself.

Lina Hakim: They don't just inhabit it; they keep transforming it...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, that's what's really nice, that's what I really like about building sites: that over time they start to look like other buildings but they're completely different because they're the subject of all the activity that's happening... whereas once they're finished, what's

happening is not to do with them (the builders) so much anymore. It's like doing a task that relates to something on the other side of the world. I like that...that group of people just constantly changing the space... I like going on there and looking at that and being involved in that. That's what I like about working on building sites, is you're changing the space all the time.

Participatory play

Lina Hakim: I remember the first time we spoke you told me about how they (the builders) were in a completely separate world from the rest of the museum...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah that's where the idea of creating an event to get the two people to meet came from... They are kind of hidden behind their hoarding... it's a weird segregation... I was just interested in how different the two worlds were. Not the people, but what happens in those areas: because you've got a museum which

wants to fix everything and wants nothing to alter or affect it in any way. And then you've got this environment within the museum, which is all about change, and you have this huge violent upheaval of space and... I think that's quite strange how different the two worlds are.

The event that Liam is referring to is a 'Concrete Bowling Tournament' that he set up as a contest, on the Exhibition Road building site on Friday 19 December 2014, between a team formed of V&A staff and a team of builders working on the site. As he puts it, 'the hoardings around the building site keep these two groups apart, the game was an event devised to create a meeting'.⁴ The idea, Liam explains, came from observing and drawing the man carrying a bucket of concrete he mentions earlier in our conversation. The man was performing a ritual known as the 'slump test' on a

building site. It involves collecting concrete from the wagon, carrying it up the ramp in a bucket, pouring it into a cone and pulling that up so that the concrete slumps, giving an indication of its workability.

In a [blog entry](#) about the tournament, Liam explains how he recovered the concrete that was discarded following the test and began playing with it in his studio: 'I most liked making balls. I would make them by hand in the same way you make a snowball, but taking a lot longer so the concrete can start to set... it is quite a meditative process patting and throwing the wet concrete between your hands compacting it into a satisfactory form. I also liked the way the concrete could start to move. I have a ramp outside my studio and I naturally started rolling these balls down the ramp at various targets and asked any visitors I had to do the same'.⁵ He explains here how he went from concrete bowling in his studio to the big bowling tournament he organised on the building site's ramp, with the bucket used for the slump test as the target.

Liam O'Connor: I just thought it would be a nice thing to suggest that people consider this idea to have this bowling game. To have the bowling game, but also to make their ball... so getting people to go through what I did, because I thought 'I really enjoy this, this is good!'. (Fig. 4) And usually I'd take a photograph or make a drawing of something in order to point in its direction to say 'I've noticed this or this is something to look at'. It's a similar thing, but instead of making a piece of work you actually get someone to do what you did: to see whether they like it as much as you did! And I thought that would be a

really playful game, to just get people to consider how the ball might roll and that sort of completely unnecessary... but it's a nice kind of distraction...



Figure 4a – Making the concrete balls ahead of the bowling tournament © Liam O'Connor

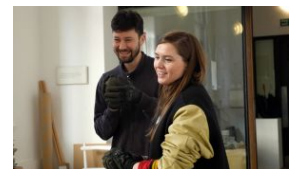


Figure 4b – V&A staff making their concrete balls ahead of the bowling tournament. © Liam O'Connor

Lina Hakim: It's really good! What you're saying is 'this is really fun and I want you guys to share this experience and this interest and this material'...

Liam O'Connor: Yeah. I really like doing residencies because it's quite disruptive being here because there are a lot of people around and it's quite nice to try and make some work about that... you know because you think I'll come to the V&A and

there's all these amazing objects, and you'll be inspired by those things. But it's actually the people that are most interesting. I liked suggesting something like that, because you don't often have that access to a group of people who might respond to you if you're in a studio on your own. All the people coming into the studio every day, it's a massive opportunity to get other points of view on the work and get a bit of momentum behind it as well. You know, like I told you about the idea, and other people, in order to refine it a little bit and work out how it might work. But also to kind of make sure I would actually do it because...

Lina Hakim: You force yourself.

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, because I can quite easily talk myself out of doing things, but if you've told people and then they ask 'oh have you asked the builders yet?' or whatever, there's a bit of pressure on you to follow through and do it. So that's good as well, having people around. And I thought that everyone was really generous towards me. The builders were brilliant to be receptive to that idea (of a tournament)... At no point was it up to question really. It was quite straightforward, you know. They quite quickly said yes and agreed to do it. Everyone bought into the idea like that.

Lina Hakim: And you don't think that's a bit down to the kind of person you are?

Liam O'Connor: Um... I'm not sure... but I think it completely relied on whether people would take to it or not. And when everyone turned up for it on the actual day, I was a bit terrified that all these people... I was really shocked by the amount of people that came. And I remember placing this bucket at the bottom of

the ramp and looking back up at the crowd and thinking ‘what have I asked people to do?’ I didn’t know whether it would be any good...



Figure 5 – A builder in mid-strike during the concrete bowling tournament. © Liam O’Connor

Lina Hakim: It was so good! (fig. 5)

Liam O’Connor: But it was really fortunate because... Even where the bucket was, was perfect. I placed it really randomly. I just kind of walked down... it wasn’t right at the bottom or towards the top. It wasn’t difficult enough that no one got it, and it wasn’t easy enough that loads of people got it. It was just placed really fortunately... but I think that Matty Pye’s strike basically made the whole day.

Lina Hakim: Ha, yes, it’s going down in history!

Liam O’Connor: It was incredible. And the thing that was really nice... after it was over, I went up to the digital team’s offices where Marco (Carnini), who’d filmed it, was looking back at it, and as I was walking towards it you could hear all this laughing. And I went into the room and everyone was crowded around the screen and then they showed me that strike. I was pretty stretched out and nervous about it when it was happening and it all went in a flash. But it was really brilliant to see people’s reactions (in the playback).

Lina Hakim: It was such a nice really big game, a bit like a festival, you know?

Liam O’Connor: Yeah it was good. It was just fun and I think people took it in completely the right spirit and it went as well as it could have gone. It was interesting because I’d never tried to do anything like that before. So I think it’s a good stepping stone to try and do something like that

again because after it was finished I was extremely happy!

Liam certainly achieved with the game his intention of creating a ‘kind of performance/event that could sit amongst all the other countless events and actions that I have observed and drawn, all contributing to the completed building’.⁶ The bowling contest, the inspiration behind it and the build-up towards it are documented in a [video](#).

Crafting gestures

Our conversation turns to some of the rituals and social patterns he observed on the building site, and some of the strange positions and locations that people occupy on it. Liam was particularly drawn by what he saw as an elaborate gestural language fit for the working conditions on the building site, and

he reflects here on how watching it lead to the ‘Clay Hand-tracing’ piece – a series of terracotta hand-held sculptures, each recording the grip and lines of the hand of a person who worked on the building project.

Lina Hakim: Do you want to talk about the gestures? Because you mentioned that before and you related it to hands and signalling, and to making hands and handcrafting...

Liam O’Connor: Well... I focused a lot on hands because I said I’d look at the building as a handcrafted object and the work of individuals on the site. Because, although what’s made now is mostly anonymous in terms of the individual’s input... To illustrate what he means, Liam relates at this point a very vivid instance of the kind of anonymous – invisible, even – work that takes place on a construction site.

Liam O’Connor: Towards the end of my time at the British Museum, there were these toilets, and they had a false wall behind them where all the plumbing was, a really small space, and this guy was in that space

for ages fixing it and getting it all sorted out. And it's just such a weird space for a person to be in because it's really narrow and really claustrophobic, and it's behind where someone will be going to the toilet for years and years. But they'll never know that for an afternoon there was this guy just working away in there on his own and so... During the building process, with people changing it all the time, your relationship to the space is really different from being just an occupier... that guy in the toilet was quite a strong example of that because probably no one else would be in that position again

once the building was made.

Lina Hakim: No one goes in there... or even sees it!



Figure 6 – Piling rig drawing clay out of the ground on the Exhibition Road building site. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Liam O'Connor: No. And once I started making the drawing I was using the drawing to look at the performances of people. I started to pick up on all the gestures they were doing because they weren't using radios: they were just using hand signals and shouting. And because of the noise on the site and their need

to communicate over a hundred yards, their gestures are really exaggerated so you get a sense... you can look at them from a window and understand the general gist of what's going on. So I liked all the language, the kind of hand language they were using, all the different hand movements I was looking at... These hand gestures were kind of an added thing I hadn't thought of before: that made hands more important on the site. So, then, I wanted to record all these hands, basically, of the guys who were working. They were meant to be portraits really.

Lina Hakim: And you made them with clay that's from the site as well?



Figure 7 – The builders play with the clay and make hand traces. © Liam O'Connor

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, so the clay came out of the ground that they excavated (fig. 6) and then I reworked it and changed it into modelling clay by various longwinded processes... (laughs) but which I really enjoyed because that was quite playful. It's nice as it's really time-consuming but you don't have to think about anything or worry about making decisions, so you can just crack on and make loads and loads of clay. And it was nice, the comments from the builders... there were a couple of guys who said they'd worked with it for 30 years, excavating around London and pulling up bits of clay, and not seen it in this form where you could make stuff from it. It was really nice to re-

present a material they were familiar with as something they could use. And it's also something to do with scale, because they're pulling up great, big, huge lumps of it and then you give them something the size of a tennis ball to work with. It feels a bit absurd compared to the scale they're usually working at with it, which I quite like as well.

Lina Hakim: Was it more like play, then?

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, it was meant to be a playful activity for them (fig. 7). I just asked them to play about with the material in (their) hands because... you know it's being picked up by JCBs (demolition and construction vehicles) and no one really touches it.

Lina Hakim: Yeah, and they've got massive gloves on.

Liam O'Connor: Yeah. But they didn't have those on when they were doing it so you've got all the lines of their hands and all that. And it was playful not having to think... and just playing with the materials. It was really nice to handle and it's sort of... I was just asking them to do what I'd done, really, but also to leave behind their marks so you had this object that was specific to them (fig. 8).



Figure 8a – Clay hand trace before the clay is fired. © Liam O'Connor



Figure 8b – Clay hand trace after the clay is fired. © Liam O'Connor

Lina Hakim: Did you tell them that was the idea?

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, I think that's why they went for it, because I said

that the object would stay in the museum. The idea came from that thing I was saying before that with builders: once you've finished you're out of there and there's no kind of record of you. And yet you've invested physically and emotionally in these spaces and then your ties to them are cut in tangible terms, but your relationship to them is still there. So you get people like this one guy, I've probably told you this before, who was probably 24, a labourer at the British Museum, who told me he took his son around

London sometimes and pointed to the buildings he'd made... and that's a really nice thing: his storytelling that makes that connection real, but there's nothing physical, only memory, to make that connection. So this was a way of making an object that would suggest that connection. And the idea that they stayed with the museum was, I think, key to them (the builders) being receptive to actually doing it, to leaving a record of themselves. They were all quite keen to get involved in that idea.

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Figure 9a – Right hand of Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), plaster cast, Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, about 1884–88. Museum no. REPRO.1892-119 © Victoria and Albert Museum



Figure 9b – Clay hand trace. © Liam O'Connor

The process of turning the clay drawn out from the ground into conventional modelling clay, which [Nao Matsunaga](#), Ceramics Resident at the V&A, taught Liam, and for which he lent him the required tools, is documented in detail in a [blog entry](#). Liam also explains there how he drew inspiration for this work from a series of plaster cast hands by the sculptor Joseph Edgar Boehm, which struck him with their ‘incredible intimacy and immediacy in their tracing of the human form’.⁷ In an ‘[Object Lesson](#)’ interview for the [V&A Research Institute Pilot Project](#), Liam explains the difference between his casts and Boehm’s (fig. 9): ‘I didn’t want to make actual

hands like he’d made hands... I wanted to make these slightly ambiguous objects that you can play about with and kind of find your own hand into their hand.’⁸ Liam enjoys this ambiguity of the final terracotta objects, how each is ‘a thing that looks weathered or made over vast amounts of time, then you can see prints and the lines of the palms – you understand it a lot more when you pick them up’.⁹ Their tactile quality is also significant: Liam conceived of the casts as ‘objects that must be picked up and played with in your hands to activate them’, an opportunity for the presence of all the people who contributed to the building to be literally felt after they have gone.¹⁰

At the end of our conversation, Liam and I look around the studio space, which he has been clearing for the past week. All the things that were distributed throughout the space, and which will have been described as ‘material’, ‘experiment’ or ‘work in progress’ while the studio was at work (fig. 10), now sit into neat piles of ‘things to keep’, ‘things to discard’ and ‘things to give away’. This leads

to a contemplation of the residency in terms of process, and to concluding thoughts about its outputs as active objects.

Lina Hakim: Do you maybe want to talk about why it's difficult to decide what to keep and what to not keep?

Liam O'Connor: Well it's just... I think I tried to be a bit more disciplined than at the British Museum. I've tried to be really ruthless and identify what is a final piece or what is worth keeping, what is a good version or a successful version of what I was trying to do rather than trying to keep every single version...

Lina Hakim: Maybe it becomes more about... more about the rituals than about the records of the ritual in that way?

Liam O'Connor: Yeah... I think this time I tried to do the drawing, the bowling and the clay hands. And I thought six months ago that these are the three things I'm going to do... I'm happier leaving it at those three things because trying to do too

much dilutes everything else. I think there's always going to be tonnes of stuff that you think is really nice. But it's not always important to act on it right away, you know? So I thought that I'd just choose the battles to do and think about other things, perhaps let them move a little bit slower because... that it's not really about... Although I made three things which are finished pieces in a way, I didn't really intend to... it's not really necessary to have come to any conclusions really, so...

Lina Hakim: It's about a process and a trace of it, I guess?



Figure 10 – View of Liam O'Connor's residency studio at the V&A. © Liam O'Connor

Liam O'Connor: Yeah, I think by accident you recreate records that the museum might be interested in,

but that was never the intention... although I guess the clay hands are intended traces. But that was more to do with... I think I'm more interested in making the work than what happens with it or what you end up with in the end. That's kind of about... because the clay hands are quite nice for that because they can still be played with even though they're made. They're supposed to be picked up and handled and kind of activated... And with the drawing, I can talk about little incidences within it: it's still kind of alive in a way. Compared to the British Museum drawing, where I was very much in control of how that was constructed, this

is kind of pretty... because I draw really quickly, you don't feel completely in control of it in terms of how well you capture something. I feel a lot of chance goes into that when you're drawing that quickly, and that's what I quite like seeing.

Endnotes

1. Explore an interactive version of the scroll and hear Liam discuss some of the details in the drawing at: www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/exhibition-road-drawing-scroll/, accessed December 2014
2. See 'Object Lesson 3: Liam O'Connor] (<https://vam.ac.uk/section/v-and-a-research-institute-pilot-project/object-lessons>), accessed December 2014
3. Liam had previously been artist in residence at the British Museum, also focusing on a construction site for its World Conservation and Exhibition

Centre. See: www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2014/artist_in_residence.aspx on 13 November 2014 at his studio at

4. Liam O'Connor, V&A blog post 'V&A Concrete Christmas Bowling Tournament' (December 24, 2014)

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Liam O'Connor, V&A blog post, 'Clay Hand Tracing' (November 17, 2014)

8. Liam O'Connor, 'Object Lesson 3: Liam O'Connor', interview with the author

9. Ibid.

10. Liam O'Connor, V&A blog post, 'Clay Hand Tracing' (November 17, 2014). Liam suggested at one point that the Clay Hand Traces could be handed out to visitors to handle as they make their way along the scroll, as a physical connection to the activity recorded in the drawing.

Contributors

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Lina Hakim is a London-based researcher, lecturer and artist, who is particularly interested in the overlaps between the material cultures of science, technology, craft and play. She is currently Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the V&A and teaches a course on 'Science, Art & Design' to undergraduate STEM students at Imperial College London. Her PhD project, 'Scientific Playthings: Artefacts, Affordance, History', looked at three 19th-century scientific instruments that became toys to explore the thinking that things afford at the levels of encounter, production, use and re-appropriation.

- [Gestures, Ritual & Play: Interview with Liam O'Connor](#)

Melissa Hamnett

Melissa Hamnett has been Curator of Sculpture at the V&A since 2007. She has spoken and published on 19th- and 20th-century sculpture, specialising particularly in the links between British and French output. More recently, she has focused on the production, consumption and display of works by the New Sculpture. She is Governor of the Decorative Arts Society, 1850-Present, and advises on public sculpture projects in the UK and abroad.

- Out of the Shadows: The Façade and Decorative Sculpture of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Part 1

Nick Humphrey

Nick Humphrey has been a curator in the Furniture Department at the V&A since 1994, where he is responsible for European furniture up to 1700. He has published on various aspects of woodwork following his involvement in the British Galleries (2001), the Medieval and Renaissance galleries (2009), and the Dr Susan Weber Furniture Gallery (2012). He is currently a council member of the Regional Furniture Society, a role he has also fulfilled for the Furniture History Society.

- Printed Sources for a South German Games Board

Roisin Inglesby

Roisin Inglesby is Curator of Architectural Drawings at Historic Royal Palaces. Previously, she was Assistant Curator of Designs at the V&A. Roisin has a BA in History from the University of Oxford and an MA in The History of Design and Material Culture from the Bard Graduate Center, New York. She is currently working on a display at the V&A about the Arts and Crafts architect Philip Webb, due to open in November 2015.

- [An Unusual Embroidery of Mary Magdalene](#)

Angela McShane

- [Editorial](#)

Liam O'Connor

Liam O'Connor is a London-based artist. He graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2006, and has exhibited in group and solo shows throughout the UK. He has been artist in residence at The British Museum since early 2010, and between April 2014 and March 2015 was artist in residence at the V&A, making work in response to the Museum's Exhibition Road Building Project. Focusing mainly on drawing, the work explores the rituals and patterns of the two very different cultures of museums and construction.

Danielle Thom

Danielle Thom is Assistant Curator of Prints at the V&A. Her PhD thesis looked at the role of satirical print culture in developing the 18th-century English public sphere. She is interested in the intersections between 18th-century sculpture and print culture, and is currently writing a book on the sculptor Joseph Nollekens.

- 'Sawney's Defence': Anti-Catholicism, Consumption and Performance in 18th-Century Britain

Swati Venkatraman Iyer

Swati Venkatraman Iyer trained as a textile designer, before completing the V&A/RCA MA in History of Design in 2014, where her research concerned the technological, social and historical dimensions of weaving. Her MA dissertation explored how textile technologies were adopted, adapted and strategically deployed as active agents of social, economic and political change in Gandhi's Khadi movement from 1917 to 1935.

- A Weft-Beater from Niya: Making a Case for the Local Production of Carpets in Ancient Cadhota (2nd to mid-4th century CE)