

Laura Cleaver, *Education in Twelfth-Century Art and Architecture: Images of Learning in Europe, c. 1100-1220*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016. 229pp. £70.00. ISBN 9781783270859

Medieval scholars are often drawn to the so-called twelfth century renaissance, but Laura Cleaver's *Education in Twelfth-Century Art and Architecture: Images of Learning in Europe, c. 1100-1220* is the first to provide a comprehensive examination into the close association between the representation of teaching and learning in art. Cleaver sets out to examine how new attitudes towards educational practices and learning were embodied in art by focusing her investigation on the representation of the seven liberal arts, including the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialect) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). Throughout the book, Cleaver emphasises the central role of art as not only representing education but functioning as a fundamental part within the learning experience.

The content of the research lends itself beautifully to the structure of the book, which follows the individual liberal arts, beginning with the *trivium*. Grammar is examined in the first chapter, and rhetoric and dialect are studied together in another chapter. The investigation of the *quadrivium* has individual chapters on music and astronomy, while geometry and arithmetic are examined together. The content of the book drives the elegant presentation of its structure and flows effortlessly through the *trivium* and *quadrivium* with two additional chapters. The first supplementary chapter considers the role of imagery for the illiterate, with the second chapter focusing on depictions of the Master. Upon first glance, this might seem discordant within the study of the Liberal Arts, however, these chapters supplement the argument. The chapter 'Telling Tales: Art for the Illiterate' demonstrates that education was not just about the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, but also about educating those outside the

confines of the scholastic environment. Cleaver is right to be more inclusive about the right for education in the twelfth century. Showing that the very representation of education was an aspect of learning, Cleaver is the first scholar to examine how these visual devices transform the audience into pupils themselves. The language of the representation of learning is thus conversant with the experience of education as well as part of the process.

The author is able to interweave iconographic analysis of art, such as sculpture, stained glass and metalwork, alongside twelfth-century pedagogical texts such as Hugh of Saint Victor's *Didascalicon* (1120s) and Thierry of Chartres' *Heptateuchon* (1140s). Cleaver also engages with texts that were used to teach in the twelfth century, including the work of Roman authors Cicero and Quintilian, as well as Patristic writers like Saint Augustine. The succinct engagement between the visual image and written sources strengthens Cleaver's argument that these images transmitted knowledge and reflected it as a process of learning for the maker and user of the image, placing them into the role of student or magister.

Cleaver begins her investigation with the type of visual material that any Gothic Art Historian is well versed with - the sculptural programmes at Chartres, Laon, and Sens. The author is the first scholar to interpret the representations of school masters and the allegorical figures of the liberal arts on these sculptural façades as responses to the lost reputation of their institution as centres of learning in the wake of the rise of the University of Paris. Such images could be viewed as ways of promoting their identity as educational centres, instilling the town with academic grandeur. In particular, Cleaver offers fresh insight into the sculptural façade at Chartres Cathedral, moving away from the conventional scholarship which focuses primarily on the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Images of education and the liberal arts were not just confined to traditional works of art such as stained glass, sculpture, and manuscripts.

In this book, Cleaver brings to the fore a rich array of visual material that has been neglected in scholarship. One such object is a fascinating twelfth-century hand-warmer kept in the Musée du Cluny (Northern France, Second Quarter of the thirteenth century, 4.8cm x 10.3cm, N° Inventaire: Cl. 17703). Engraved are the personifications of the liberal arts, including Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic and Arithmetic. This object would have provided warmth to the owner and would have been visually impressive too. As Cleaver notes, this is such an unusual object to include the personifications of the liberal arts. However, the reader would have appreciated further consideration of its function and utility, as well as its relationship to the owner and user. For example, what was the potential function of such imagery? Did they act as mnemonic prompts for the student working through the harsh winters to inspire them to attain skills in the liberal arts?

Another intriguing example is a late twelfth-century casket at the Victoria and Albert Museum (England, ca. 1190-1200, Museum Number: 7955:2-1862). The reader was happy to have their attention drawn to this object, for it shows real artistic skill and includes the unusual iconography of the allegorical figures of the liberal arts, such as rhetoric portrayed as a man holding scales. This enchanting object is rightfully brought to our attention by Cleaver, however, it also has extraordinary potential for her argument. According to the V&A catalogue, the casket may have been commissioned by a wealthy student to contain his writing tools. As an object that would have been actively used by a student, the function and utility of this object is not brought out as much as it could be.¹ The absence of this contextual information feels like a missed opportunity as it was a device used for writing by a student.

¹ Cleaver does include reference to an earlier article where she briefly expands on her research of the casket: L. Cleaver, 'The Liberal Arts in Sculpture and Metalwork in Twelfth-Century France and Ideals of Education', *Immediations*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2007), p. 7.

Another object that could have benefited from further examination is a now privately owned gilded copper bowl found at Horst that contains an unusual depiction of Boethius alongside Arithmetic.² However, Cleaver neglects to provide any further visual analysis of, or context for, the bowl. According to other sources, such an object may have been used during penitential handwashing, especially by nuns.³ Other art historians have since argued that the valuable nature of bronze and the delicate engraved designs point to such a bowl being used as pedagogical tool in the classroom.⁴ However, Cleaver does not reference the potential educational function of this bowl and how it would have been experienced by the user. This in turn would not only have strengthened her argument, but would have provided a glimpse into the educational tools used by medieval teachers.

Overall, the richness of the diversity and spectrum of objects considered in this book is extremely helpful to scholar who is looking at the representation of knowledge. In the examination of such neglected objects, Cleaver identifies that education and visual culture worked as a two-way system. The making of the art became part of the learning experience as did looking at the object. This novel interpretation is thus further highlighted through Cleaver's examination of under-researched and unusual objects.

The author notes that our knowledge of medieval classroom is limited, for whilst there are many written discussions of education, medieval authors revealed 'little about contemporary educational experiences' (p.7). In addition to examining the iconography of astronomy, in the final chapter

² J. Weitzmann-Fiedler, *Romanische gravierte Bronzeschalen* (Berlin, 1981), Cat. 28, pp. 81-2.

³ See Josepha Weitzmann-Fiedler in the *Romanische gravierte Bronzeschalen* (Berlin, 1981)

⁴ Adam S. Cohen, Linda Safran, 'Learning from Romanesque bronze bowls', *Word & Image*, Vol. 22 (No. 3, July-September 2006), pp. 211-218

Cleaver also offers insight into the complex instruments associated with the practical application of this art, focusing on astrolabes and nocturlabes, as well as dials, tubes and spheres.

As mentioned, Cleaver devotes a chapter to focusing on the complex dichotomy between the educated and the illiterate. In chapter three, Cleaver investigates how art became a suitable vehicle for expressing messages about the importance of education. Cleaver opens her investigation with a concise overview of the various twelfth-century views of the role of art as teaching tools, quoting Honorius Augustodunensis, Peter of Roissy, and John Beleth.

To understand how education was visually conveyed to an illiterate audience, Cleaver looks to fables. Fables offered the opportunity to present ‘messages about the wisdom of knowing one’s place and using learning responsibly’ (p.63) being ‘particularly suitable for teaching children and the uneducated’ (p.66). Cleaver examines how playful depictions of animals with human traits, such as the musician ass, and the teaching of bears and wolves, were used to demonstrate negative qualities associated with education. While the research into these categories is very well established, Cleaver synthesises a wealth of material concerning the illiterate to provide excellent examples of specific fables, and the moral implications of such visual material in warning of the danger of the irresponsible teacher. Cleaver’s fresh insight into these images shows how they may have functioned as cautioning against the foolishness of students, which could have ‘potentially dangerous consequences for the community’ (p.78).

Chapter five offers an interesting insight into the depictions of Masters, such as Gilbert of Poitiers, Peter Lombard, Adam of the Petit Pont, and Hugh of Saint Victor. Cleaver shows the complex perception of the role of Masters, who were often depicted as celebrated authors in conjunction with their work. What is important and original to the discussion of the

author portrait is the author's discussion of how the iconography of the Master was indebted to earlier depictions of the Evangelists. By portraying the Master often seated and in the process of writing, the visual resonance with the four Gospel writers may have further imbedded the image of the Master with a sense of authority. According to Cleaver, the inclusion of the Master was a way of 'proclaiming the value of a work and its author' (p.115). Cleaver articulately demonstrates how the desire to promote the work of a Master can be understood in a context rife with competition and controversy. For the Master was often precariously balancing between heterodoxy and orthodoxy.

This book is richly illustrated, with black and white images placed conveniently alongside the text, as well as the addition of seven colour plates. There are times when objects that receive lengthy descriptions are not illustrated. As a reader I would have loved to have seen images from Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France MS Latin 7900A and Cardiff, National Library of Wales MS 735c, which readers cannot access online. However, I understand the immense financial burden for art historians in acquiring images rights.⁵

Overall, this book offers a fresh insight into the relationship between the changing attitudes of education and its representation in art and architecture. Cleaver is the first scholar to examine how representations of learning do not just convey messages about education but are intrinsic parts of the learning experience. *Education in Twelfth-Century Art and Architecture: Images of Learning in Europe, c. 1100-1220* is a must-read for any scholar interested in the history of learning and visual culture.

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⁵ See Kathryn Rudy, 'The true costs of research and publishing', *Times Higher Education*, August 29, 2019 (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/true-costs-research-and-publishing>)

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