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REVIEWS

George Henderson, *Vision and Image in Early Christian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 292 pp., plates.

George Henderson's book examines visual and literary imagery surviving from early Christian England in an attempt to recreate the exemplars available to artists working in England primarily during the seventh century. Although aimed primarily at art historians, Henderson's work is valuable also to those interested in literary imagery. Throughout *Vision and Image* Henderson fits English art into the larger framework of late antique continental culture by emphasizing Italy in particular as the source for most of the exemplars in early Christian England. Henderson's primary interest is to explore the imagery available to artists and to understand how exemplars were adapted or incorporated to meet the visual needs of early Christians in England.

For Henderson, early Christian England refers to the first centuries after Augustine's mission in A.D. 597. He is primarily interested in the seventh century, although he occasionally dips into the eighth or ninth centuries. Henderson begins by briefly discussing the meaning of religious imagery to early Christians in the late first through early third centuries. He then moves into a survey of late antique Christian art, with a sharp focus on imperial and papal art in Rome and Ravenna. Henderson argues that religious art in England was created for enjoyment of individuals, both secular and religious, who were immersed in a literate monastic culture, and that this expression of visual imagery had its antecedents in the classical world of late antiquity.

Henderson demonstrates the interrelationship between the secular and religious by reexamining the stylistic similarities between the Sutton Hoo treasure and the manuscript illuminations in the Book of Durrow. He then goes on to demonstrate the close relationship between visual and literary image. His comparisons include English art and literature as well as Continental art and literature that would have been available in England. In addition to his discussion of concrete literary and visual objects, Henderson also addresses the interrelationship between the use of color as an artistic tool and as a literary symbol. His treatment of the imperial purple murex dye in English contexts is perhaps the best chapter in the book. Henderson concludes by examining various artistic expressions, and tacitly argues that the harmony between the visual and literary imagery was employed by the elite to enhance their power.

Henderson does an admirable job of demonstrating the interrelationship between visual and literary image in early English Christian art. The strength of his argument stems from Henderson's willingness to look beyond the borders of England for artistic exemplars. *Vision and Image* demonstrates a strong connection between insular and continental art. Rather than limiting himself to English art and literature, Henderson incorporates England into a larger late antique cultural milieu, arguing for multiple influences, including Roman, Frankish, Germanic, Christian, and Celtic, upon English Christian imagery.

Vision and Image is not without problems, however. The lack of chronological continuity damages his argument at points, particularly when Henderson argues for artistic influence between objects separated in time and space. For example, Henderson notes the stylistic connection between the Sutton Hoo

cloisonné jewelry (buried in East Anglia in the early seventh century) and the geometric designs of the manuscript illuminations in the Book of Durrow (composed perhaps in Northumbria or Durrow in the late seventh–early eighth century). Instead of describing the relationship in terms of common cultural aesthetics, Henderson tries to argue that the Book of Durrow represents exemplars used by jewelry manufacturers. While interesting, such an argument requires more evidence to convince.

Henderson's work offers a fresh synthesis of much of the scholarship regarding English Christian art, including manuscript illumination, sculpture, jewelry, and literary images. He takes well-known scholarship, such as the relationship between the *Codex Amiatinus* and Cassiodorus's establishment at Vivarium, and uses it to support his thesis relating art and literature. *Vision and Image* also contributes a tacit acknowledgement of England's connection with a larger cultural world. The work assumes an easy familiarity with both English history and geography and is best suited to those well-versed in the field of Anglo-Saxon history.

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