

THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE
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RECREATING THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

ACTS OF RECYCLING, REVISION, AND RELOCATION

Edited by

JOSEPH SHACK and
HANNAH WEAVER

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS

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THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

The Medieval Globe provides an interdisciplinary forum for scholars of all world areas by focusing on convergence, movement, and interdependence. Contributions to a global understanding of the medieval period (broadly defined) need not encompass the globe in any territorial sense. Rather, *TMG* advances a new theory and praxis of medieval studies by bringing into view phenomena that have been rendered practically or conceptually invisible by anachronistic boundaries, categories, and expectations. *TMG* also broadens discussion of the ways that medieval processes inform the global present and shape visions of the future.



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Volume 6

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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ISBN (HB): 9781641894258

eISBN: 9781641894265

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	vi
Introduction to <i>Recreating the Medieval Globe: Acts of Recycling, Revision, and Relocation</i> JOSEPH SHACK and HANNAH WEAVER	1
Self-Revision and the Arabic Historical Tradition: Identifying Textual Reuse and Reorganization in the Works of al-Balādhurī RYAN J. LYNCH	9
When Curtains Fall: A Shape-Shifting Silk of the Late Abbasid Period MEREDYTH LYNN WINTER	31
Salvaging Meaning: The Art of Recycling in Sino-Mongol Quanzhou, ca. 1276–1408 JENNIFER PURTLE	57
Recontextualizing Indigenous Knowledge on the Prussian–Lithuanian Frontier, ca. 1380–1410 PATRICK MEEHAN	93
<i>Meubles</i> : The Ever Mobile Middle Ages ELIZABETH EMERY	121
Reflection DANIEL LORD SMAIL	155
Index.....	163

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2.1. Two versions of al-Balādhurī's narrative.....	23
Figure 3.1. The so-called "robe of Bahā' al-Dawlah," shown in its current state of preservation.....	32
Figure 3.2. Late Abbasid Dynastic and Chronological Chart.....	33
Figure 3.3. Hypothetical reconstruction of the Buyid-era curtain (<i>sitr</i>).....	34
Figure 3.4. Reconstruction of the Seljuk-era robe and the placement of its inscriptions.....	41
Figure 3.5. "Abu Zayd and his son before the Qadi," from <i>The Maqāmāt</i> of al-Ḥarīrī (634/1236–37), painted by al-Wāsiṭī.....	42
Figure 3.6. Iranian, <i>Figure of a Courtier from a Palace Frieze</i> , between 1150 and 1250, painted stucco.....	46
Figure 4.1. Unknown artisan(s), under the direction of Benhong (fl. early–mid thirteenth century): Cow-herding girls offer milk (<i>Mu nǚ xian [ru]mī</i>), from base of the East Pagoda, Kaiyuan Buddhist Temple, Quanzhou, ca. 1238.....	63
Figure 4.2. <i>Xinbian duixiang siyan</i> [New Edition of the Facing Illustrations, Four-Words(-in-a-Group Primer)] (China, 1436?), pages 1a–b.....	63
Figure 4.3. Brahmanic relief depicting a sacred cow and Śiva lingam, Quanzhou, Yuan dynasty.....	64
Figure 4.4. Gravestone with Arabic text, 1335.....	65
Figure 4.5. Gravestone for the Lady Martha Terim (d. 1331?), Quanzhou.....	67
Figure 4.6. Christian gravestone, Quanzhou, Yuan dynasty.....	67
Figure 4.7. Gravestone of Andrew of Perugia (d. 1332).....	69
Figure 4.8. Detail of East Pagoda Base, Quanzhou, Fujian.....	71
Figure 4.9. Brahmanic reliefs of Simha and Narasimha, salvaged from an unknown temple, ca. 1281(?); installed in the main courtyard of the Kaiyuan si temple, Quanzhou.....	72
Figure 4.10. Brahmanic narrative relief installed at the Airavatesvara temple in Thanjavur, Darasuram, Tamil Nadu, ca. mid-twelfth century.....	72

Figure 4.11. <i>Quanzhou gu Yisilanjiao Xumizuo jitanshi shimu</i> (Ancient Islamic Mount Sumeru-base, altar-shaped stone grave marker from Quanzhou).	73
Figure 4.12. Heavenly Longevity Pagoda (<i>Tianzhong wanshou ta</i>), dated 1059. Xianyou county, Fujian.	75
Figure 4.13. Sanskrit-inscribed dhāraṇī sūtra-style pagodas, erected at the site of the Wan'an Bridge, dated 1059.	76
Figure 4.14. Li Jie (1065–1110) et al., <i>Jieji diese zuo jiaozhu</i> (Stepped-and-stacked-base square column), from <i>Li Zhongming Yingzao fashi</i> ([Treatise on] State Building Methods) (Zijiang, 1925), Supplemental Images, page 29:7b: a lost 1103 edition reconstructed from a Song dynasty Shaoxing era (1131–1362) manuscript edition and printed in the format of the Song dynasty Chongning era (1102–1106).	77
Figure 4.15. <i>Citrakhaṇḍa</i> pillars salvaged from an unknown temple, installed in the rear exterior corridor of the Kaiyuan si temple, Quanzhou, Fujian.	80
Figure 4.16. Manuel Dias (1574–1659), <i>Tang jingjiao bei song zhengquan</i> (Orthodox interpretation of Nestorian stele paeen) (China, 1644), 9b–10a.	82
Figure 4.17. Brahmanic architectonic module depicting Kali, now worshipped as Guanyin, in Quanzhou, thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.	83
Figure 6.1. The “Cathedral-Corner” of Montesquiou’s apartment at 41, Quai d’Orsay (before 1888).	123
Figure 6.2. The François I ^{er} room of the Hôtel de Cluny.	129
Figure 6.3. Another view of the François I ^{er} room of the Hôtel de Cluny.	131
Figure 6.4. “Twelfth-Century Castle Bedroom.”	132
Figure 6.5. “Fifteenth-Century Castle Bedroom.”	133
Figure 6.6. Etching of the Oak Gallery of Hauteville House.	136
Figure 6.7. The Oak Gallery.	137
Figure 6.8. Etching of the Vestibule at Hauteville House.	140
Figure 6.9. “La Collection Spitzer.”	142
Figure 6.10. Right side of the “Medieval dining room” in Loti’s Rochefort home.	144

INTRODUCTION TO RECREATING THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE: ACTS OF RECYCLING, REVISION, AND RELOCATION

JOSEPH SHACK AND HANNAH WEAVER

On December 2, 2019, a Danish court ruled against a group of timepiece entrepreneurs who had planned to cut up the painting *Paris Chic*, by the Israeli artist known as Tal R (Tal Rosenzweig), to make faces for a limited-edition release of wristwatches. While Danish copyright law allows the owners of artworks to destroy them at will, the artist's lawyers successfully argued that the proposed wristwatches would alter rather than destroy the work—and thus contravened the law.¹ The court thus deemed that the involuntary creative reuse of an artist's work and name is unlawful. In today's legal and cultural climate this decision might seem reasonable—even ordinary. Before the advent of copyright law, however, repurposing objects and texts that had aesthetic or ideological value was a widespread practice. Were Tal R a medieval artist, his painting might well have been cut up and used to make religious pendants or even jewellery, at almost any time up until the twentieth century. Our conception of fair use has radically shifted.

This volume of *The Medieval Globe* transcends disciplinary and geographical boundaries to enable a wide-ranging examination of creative reuse in (and of) the global Middle Ages, through practices of recycling, revision, and relocation. The essays gathered here are united, not by a single methodology or field of inquiry, but by synchronic and diachronic consideration of renegotiated meanings. Their authors analyze how a range of historical actors—from writers to craftsmen to warriors—reinterpreted the old in new sociocultural contexts. In the process, they elucidate how reuse was a truly global practice throughout the interconnected Middle Ages, and how medieval objects continued to be reused by post-medieval generations.

The multivalence of reused objects and ideas, whether pillaged or scavenged, written or carved, was the topic of a symposium held at Harvard University in

¹ Orange, "Danish Court Rules Artist's Work Cannot be Cut Up to Make Watches."

February of 2018, which generated sufficient interest to impel us to take our collective research further. We had originally asked ourselves: what could new versions and contexts of artifacts accomplish that the original ones could not? What role did time and/or physical (dis)location play in the reception of events or artifacts? Why and how did medieval works endure and remain relevant in cultural contexts far removed from those in which they were first made? What socio-cultural factors account for the popularity of objects and texts in particular places at particular times? Presentations traversed the medieval globe and encompassed thirteen centuries of repurposing. Despite the temporal and spatial diversity of responses, the significance of creative reuse emerged as a shared theme of all communications.

Recycling, revision, and relocation are capacious concepts that speak to the creative potential of re-engagement with pre-existing materials. Each bears its own set of critical resonances; together, they triangulate among different modes of creative reuse. In previous scholarship, recycling has often been applied to unpacking the changing contexts of objects and their afterlives. The archeologist Michael Schiffer has subdivided this process into three different activities: lateral cycling, when an object changes hands but not purposes; recycling, when materials are reused to make a different object; and secondary use, when an object stays in the same form but is used in a way not initially intended.² The motivation behind recycling can be merely utilitarian (a former wine vat now holds another liquid) or more significant (a column from one religious establishment is integrated into another, with the intent of transferring some of its previous talismanic properties). The productive potential of recycling practices is recuperated by some of the essays in this volume, as Elizabeth Emery weighs varieties of medievalist reuse and Jennifer Purtle and Meredyth Winter approach recycling in the Chinese and Islamic contexts, respectively.

Within his three categories of recycling, Schiffer assumes that the object in question had a singular or specific purpose in its original context, but this is not always the case. Revision, too, might seem to imply the existence of a stable core: to revise, there must be a pre-existing textual entity that remains to some extent recognizable even after its transformation. But at its Latin root, revision means seeing again (*re-visio*), or with new eyes. It thus testifies to the significance of the reviser's motivation, the impetus behind the act of reshaping. In contrast to recycling, then, revision implies a sustained engagement with a text and

² Schiffer, "Archaeological Context and Systemic Context"; see also Smail, Pizzorno, and Hay, "Recyclage et l'ontologie de l'objet."

a desire to refashion it toward another end. In this volume the generative potential of “seeing again” is investigated by Patrick Meehan, who considers the transformation of text and landscape through revisions provoked by new cultural contexts and interactions. Ryan Lynch’s contribution, meanwhile, deals with revision in its most colloquial sense, the process through which an author revisits and reforms his own material.

The final element of our triad, relocation, is the most ample category of all. As texts, objects, and ideas circulate, their relocation(s) allow them to take on meanings and values—ideological, aesthetic, functional—that had not accrued to them in their past lives. New contexts generate novel interpretive possibilities. While scholars have often used the words *spolia* (“spoils,” booty) and spoliation to denote such objects and their relocation, we regard these terms as simultaneously too narrow and too broad. The term *spolia* was borrowed from classical Latin by humanist scholars in the sixteenth century to describe a process by which materials were forcibly removed from their initial sociopolitical contexts and subsequently redeployed in composite constructions.³ *Stricto sensu*, the term referred only to the reuse of statuary and architectural material from antiquity in later constructions. An oft-cited example of spoliation in this restricted sense is the Arch of Constantine, which commemorated the emperor’s victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge by incorporating earlier works from the periods of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius.⁴

In recent years, however, spoliation has exceeded these bounds and become disassociated from the original connotations of violent extraction. New scholarly analyses have broadened the concept of *spolia* to indicate any reuse of costly materials, whether plundered or not. This has, in turn, prompted other scholars to ask whether spoliation is an appropriate descriptor for objects that might have been given as gifts or procured as souvenirs,⁵ and even to suggest that it has lost its critical valence entirely and become synonymous with “reuse.”⁶ A symptomatic manifestation is the recent collection *Reuse Value*, edited by Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, which moves beyond spoliation to consider the broader category

3 For an excellent discussion of the etymology of *spolia* and related terms, see Kinney, introduction to Brilliant and Kinney, *Reuse Value*, 4–5; a concise historiographical overview of spoliation is found in Kinney, “Rape or Restitution?,” 51–55.

4 For a recent study of the arch, see Wilson Jones, “Genesis and Mimesis.”

5 See, for example, Shalem’s discussion of Islamic treasury objects in medieval Europe in *Islam Christianized*.

6 Greenhalgh, for example, argues that to referring to objects as *spolia* includes all of the conceptual baggage and prejudices inherent to the term; “Spolia: A Definition in Ruins,” 78–80.

of appropriation.⁷ It includes chapters on non-European contexts, post-antique/medieval architecture, and the reuse of entire buildings for functions beyond the purview of their original intent.⁸ Yet the collection still restricts its inquiry to the appropriation of objects and architectural elements; the reuse of texts and ideas does not enter the discussion.

By offering a triad of critical terms, we therefore map the terrain of creative reuse along two axes of inquiry: “texts and things” and “places and spaces.” Through “texts and things,” the essays delve into historical writing (Lynch) and the transferred authority that inheres to ceremonial objects (Winter). Via “places and spaces,” our authors travel from medieval China to Lithuania to analyze the creation of holy sites (Purtle), the navigational recreation of an occupied landscape (Meehan), and the legacy of medieval objects in the nineteenth century (Emery). Finally, Daniel Lord Smail offers a reflection on the article as a whole.

In the first essay on the “texts and things” axis, Ryan Lynch exploits the possibilities of digital humanities to locate and examine the self-revision of the Muslim historian al-Balādhurī in his two surviving works, *The Book of the Conquests of Lands* and *The Lineage of Nobles*. Though covering roughly similar time periods, each text embodies features of disparate literary genres; juxtaposing these texts demonstrates the malleability of historical material in the hands of an adept medieval compiler. Next, Meredyth Lynn Winter treads the line between text and textile, investigating how an Abbasid patron refashioned a curtain from ca.1000 into a silk robe while retaining the authorizing value of the curtain’s original inscription. Considering the textile within late Abbasid intellectual contexts, she explores how an object, despite significant alteration, could inhere political power and bureaucratic significance.

Along the “places and spaces” axis, Jennifer Purtle comes from the vantage point of East Asian art history to situate medieval Quanzhou within the global circulation of religions and their concomitant architectural elements. She argues that interconfessional salvage resulted in a “formal, material, and salvific patois,” and that this explains the specificity of Quanzhou’s architectural hybridity in a period when the city was one of the biggest ports in the world. The second essay on this axis, by Patrick Meehan, investigates the creation and transfer of knowledge about the “wilderness” during the Baltic crusades. He considers the possible motives and outcomes that governed the construction of the navigational texts known as the

⁷ Brilliant and Kinney, *Reuse Value*.

⁸ Examples include Kalakoski and Huuhka who, citing the broadening perspective posited in *Reuse Value*, advocate the extension of the concept of *spolia* to contemporary architecture as a means of exploring the experiential value of sites that utilize reclaimed parts: “Spolia Revisited and Extended.”

Wegeberichte, while acknowledging the problems that come along with the reuse of indigenous knowledge for violent ends. Considering the movement of medieval objects beyond the Middle Ages, Elizabeth Emery focuses on the various ways that medieval furniture circulated within the cultural context of nineteenth-century France. The uses of furniture to create “medievalizing” spaces becomes a valuable lens through which to examine contemporary attitudes toward the medieval, more generally.

In sum, this volume demonstrates the broad importance of medieval recreations. Moving past traditional critical categories, the authors consider the generative possibilities of medieval reuse and offer a new critical vocabulary for the discussion of recycling, revision, and relocation in a global context.

Note on the Transliteration of Arabic

In this volume, Arabic has been transliterated with appropriate diacritical markings, except in the case of certain common proper nouns (e.g., Abbasid). At the same time, only terms that would be unfamiliar to most non-specialists have been italicized (e.g., *sitr*).

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Abstract The creative reuse of materials, texts, and ideas was a common phenomenon in the medieval world. The essays in this volume offer a synchronic and diachronic consideration of the receptions and meanings of events and artifacts, analyzing the processes that allowed medieval works to remain relevant in socio-cultural contexts far removed from those in which they originated. In the process, they elucidate the global valences of recycling, revision, and relocation throughout the interconnected Middle Ages, and their continued relevance for the shaping of modernity.

Keywords circulation, global studies, medieval studies, recycling, reuse, spoliation
