

*Journal of British Studies* 61 (October 2022): 996–1045.

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the North American Conference on British Studies. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

## *Book Reviews*

### **Pre-1800**

EDINA ADAM and JULIAN BROOKS. *William Blake, Visionary*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2020. Pp. 160. \$35.00 (cloth).  
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2022.148

Edited by Edina Adam and Julian Brooks, *William Blake, Visionary* was meant to accompany an exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum, a modified version of the Tate Britain's 2019 blockbuster Blake exhibition. However, just as the Tate's show closed in February of 2020, the global pandemic began. The Getty's show is now rescheduled to open in fall 2023. While the majority of the works discussed are those from the Tate's collection, it contains a few gems that are not the Tate's, including Blake's stunning pencil-and-wash self-portrait (1802/1804), which heads the catalogue as plate 1. Although it has some unique items and is a smartly made book, on the whole, this catalogue is considerably less comprehensive than that which accompanied the Tate's show. It contains 114 plates (the Tate's catalogue has 167). Rather than reiterating the Tate's chronological approach, the Getty curators opted to arrange the plates in thematic sections that cover (in this order) Blake's paid professional work, his invention of relief etching, the artists contemporary to him, his role as "visionary," and finally as "mythmaker."

True to the stated purpose of the exhibit, which is to bring "the artist and his work to a wider US audience" (11), the catalogue is shorter on scholarly apparatus than one might wish. A short, mostly biographical introduction is followed by two scholarly essays, "William Blake's 'Bounding Outline': On the Sources of Artistic Originality," by Adam, the show's curator, and "America's Blake," by Matthew Hargraves. Adam provides a clear and well-researched explanation of Blake's philosophy of art. She exposes more than argues, which is in keeping with the aim of the book. Hargraves, however, provocatively declares, "no nation has rivaled the United States in its enthusiasm" for Blake (29). Hargraves traces the history of North American Blake collecting, which began with a few Boston elites in the first half of the nineteenth century and then became a pursuit of the early twentieth-century robber-barons-cum-bibliophiles J. P. Morgan and Henry Huntington. As Hargraves describes it, Huntington's desire to civilize California with the seeds of English culture led to resentment,

as English treasures slipped out of English hands. By the mid-twentieth century, Paul and Mary Mellon dominated Blake acquisition—and the essay predictably ends with a paean to collector-scholar Robert N. Essick, who has “formed the most comprehensive collection of Blake’s work from across his entire career in all genres and media” (34). Well known in Blake circles, Essick is one of the editors of the groundbreaking William Blake Archive, a free online resource, and the editor of *William Blake at the Huntington* (1994). Unlike the Getty, which is not especially strong in Blake holdings, the nearby Huntington Library in San Marino boasts an extensive collection of his works. Several of the works represented in the present catalogue come from the Huntington and others from Essick’s private collection. The book is also dedicated to Essick and cites his knowledge and generosity as invaluable to the Getty’s project.

As perhaps can be said of all Blake catalogues, the book skews toward the art-historical. Of Blake’s illuminated books, the catalogue reproduces only two of the poems from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and three from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794). There are images but no text from *The Book of Urizen* (1794) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). Happily, it does, however, reproduce all eighteen plates of Yale Center for British Art’s colored copy of *America. A Prophecy* (1793) and ten of the showier plates from *Jerusalem* (1804), both of which show fine examples of Blake’s word-and-image illuminated printing.

While the Tate catalogue closes with the iconic *The Ancient of Days* frontispiece from *Europe a Prophecy* (1794), this catalogue ends on an equally satisfying note. Its final plates are *Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion* facing the *Laocoön*, graphic works from early and late in Blake’s career respectively. While these works may not boast the fiery color or iconicity of *Urizen*’s golden compass, they certainly round out a portrait of Blake’s status as “The Myth-maker,” as the catalogue section is titled. Both pictures powerfully speak to Blake’s ability to incorporate and repurpose images into the service of his own mythologies. While Adam’s headnote does not mention *Joseph of Arimathea*, Blake initially made the plate as a teenager in 1773. It is a copy of a sixteenth-century Italian engraving, which in turn is the study of a figure in the foreground of Michelangelo’s fresco depicting the crucifixion of St. Peter. Blake’s caption, which was added to the 1810 version of the print, recasts this figure—a nameless extra painted into a fresco on a dark church wall—as Joseph of Arimathea, the mythological bearer of the Holy Grail. Blake, moreover, describes the figure as one of the ancient architects, Christian artists unworthy of our present age. While Adam’s headnote leaves all of this up to the reader to discover, she does explain that Blake initially produced the *Laocoön* print for commercial use: it was the illustration for an encyclopedia entry about *Laocoön and His Sons*, an ancient Greek statue unearthed in Rome in the Renaissance. Ultimately, though, Blake’s picture wound up as “a snapshot of Blake’s concerns in his myth-making” (141). Indeed, Blake’s 1826–27 aphorism-laden print recasts a minor character from the *Iliad* as Yahweh himself.

Thora Brylowe   
University of Colorado Boulder  
[thora.brylowe@colorado.edu](mailto:thora.brylowe@colorado.edu)

MICHAEL D. J. BINTLEY. *Settlements and Strongholds in Early Medieval England: Texts, Landscapes, and Material Culture*. Studies in the Early Middle Ages 45. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020. Pp. 234. \$98.00 (cloth).  
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2022.155

With *Settlements and Strongholds in Early Medieval England*, Michael Bintley delivers a stimulating and successful new contribution to the combined study of the literature and archaeology