

## Origins, survivals, and other metahistorical fictions in Enlightenment conjectural histories of art

Review of:

Hans Christian Hönes, *Kunst am Ursprung: Das Nachleben der Bilder und die Souveränität des Antiquars*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014, 327 pp., 89 b/w illus., €37.99 pbk or ebook, ISBN 978-3-8376-2750-3.

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Hans Christian Hönes's learned and capacious study of three antiquaries writing at the turn of the nineteenth century—Pierre-François Hugues (better known as 'Baron' d'Hancarville), Richard Payne Knight, and James Christie Jr—argues for a counter-tradition of art historical writing concerned with origins and survivals, exemplified in the experimental and conjectural work of these three men. The eight substantive chapters fall into two parts. Five chronological chapters focusing on each writer's body of work (two each on d'Hancarville and Knight and one on Christie) are followed by three chapters devoted to concepts: 'De-Temporalization' [*Entzeitlichung*]; 'Surveyability' [*Übersichtlichkeit*]; and 'Entanglements' [*Verwicklungen*].<sup>1</sup> Though at times overly ambitious, this will be an engrossing book for any scholar interested in eighteenth-century antiquarianism or conjectural history.

Hönes defines his own subject as 'the art historiography of the eighteenth century' (9), so the relevance of his book in the present context is very clear. His approach highlights, without resolving, an interesting ambiguity that arises partly from differences between eighteenth- and twentieth/twenty-first-century usage of the term 'historiography.' It is not always clear how or why these eighteenth-century art histories are themselves 'historiographic narratives' (10), though as histories of art they are certainly objects of historiographic inquiry in the modern sense. Hönes further clarifies his subject in two helpful ways early on. He is concerned with historical narratives of a living symbolic tradition, rather than with narratives of belatedness or a decline of art, and specifically with 'narratives that address the special status of pictures as media for preserving tradition.'<sup>2</sup> At the same time he makes the point that this way of understanding pictures (as

<sup>1</sup> A more accurate translation of *Übersichtlichkeit*, in the spirit of Mark Twain, would be 'the property of being capable of being taken in at one view.' The dictionary definition of this word, 'perspicuity', won't do here, for reasons that will become clear later. The other two terms carry similar complications.

<sup>2</sup> 'historiographische Narrative, die zudem auf den besonderen Status von Bildern als Medien der Überlieferung abzielen' (10).

conserving history) dates back to humanism and general historiography, locating one point of origin in Francesco Bianchini's *Istoria universale* (1697).

With Bianchini, if not before, the crucial premise is in place that via their hieroglyphic or symbolic content, 'objects from more recent times can . . . become source material for earlier, pre-literate, and hence—in the modern sense—prehistoric epochs.'<sup>3</sup> This understanding of historical time fits the rubric of 'survivals' theorized most recently by Georges Didi-Huberman in *L'image survivante* (2002), whose account, Hönes notes, is now widely accepted (11n8). (He cites the 2010 German translation of this book, which has not yet been translated into English.) Here a further distinction is necessary: Hönes is not primarily concerned in his book with the art historical 'school' most obviously connected with survivals and historical continuity, the monastic school represented by Bernard de Montfaucon. His project is to identify another set of protagonists, art historians who did not share the former's commitments to 'positivism' (or, better, 'truth-seeking'). These protagonists—this is Hönes's own apt literary description of their role in his work—are Pierre Hugues d'Hancarville, Richard Payne Knight, and James Christie. These dissenting antiquaries felt empowered by the long afterlives of ancient symbols to frame the 'fantastic and highly speculative histories' that have led to their angry dismissal as charlatans by modern scholarship (13).

Hönes is absolutely right to challenge the strong prejudice against these speculative art historians. His close readings and contextualizations of their work over the next five chapters (II-VI) produce a much fuller and richer understanding of eighteenth-century art historical practice than that offered by scholars who focus more narrowly on canonical protagonists such as Montfaucon, the Comte de Caylus, and above all Johann Joachim Winckelmann. As Hönes acknowledges, his work is part of a slowly growing recovery effort, for which Francis Haskell's article of 1984 may be taken as the forerunner.<sup>4</sup> There is much to be gained by attending to the energy and confidence with which d'Hancarville, Knight, and Christie posit new paradigms for the origin of art on the basis of their notions of survival, and to their desire to reinterpret 'against the grain' the evidence mustered by their predecessors, as expressed by the term *Gegengeschichte*. This term, meaning counter-history, is a key theoretical term throughout the book, second in importance only to *Nachleben* or survival (literally afterlife). Hönes's own account, then, is a welcome counter-history to those that acknowledge only empirically-driven practitioners as disciplinary ancestors.

This somewhat polemical framework does, however, lead Hönes to downplay these antiquaries' relationships to their objects, relationships that may

<sup>3</sup> 'Objekte aus späteren Zeiten können so zu Quellen für frühere, vorschriftliche und damit—im modernen Sinne—prähistorische Epochen werden' (11).

<sup>4</sup> This article, 'The Baron d'Hancarville: An Adventurer and Art Historian in Eighteenth-Century Europe', was reprinted as the second chapter of Haskell's *Past and Present in Art and Taste*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1987, 30-45.

have been unorthodox but were nonetheless vital to their theories. Though it is instructive to consider any claim about the origins of art as a ‘metahistorical fiction’ that empowers antiquarian theory, it should be added that the materials in question, ranging from ancient vase painting to gems to sculpture in these accounts, decisively determine the form and the claims of these origin stories. At times it almost seems as though there is another, subterranean polemic at work in this book that reasserts the power of discourse over against the objects that have dominated so much recent thinking in the humanities, from theories of material culture to ‘thing theory’, object-oriented ontology, actor-network theory, and other new materialisms. In the case of d’Hancarville’s and Christie’s work on vases, in particular, it should be noted that one of the lasting material effects of this engagement was to elevate vase painting to the status of high art, as Michael Vickers, among others, has argued.<sup>5</sup>

As Hönes rightly points out, the term ‘antiquary’ itself carries a new set of pejorative connotations for some modern scholars, who feel that it is prejudicial to the archaeological contributions of the eighteenth century (12n11). It is worth noting that these connotations vary somewhat with the national context. In the English context, it is symptomatic that the Society of Antiquaries of London has not seen fit to change its name, and in a historical work—even one concerned to explore and celebrate the tradition of presentism in art history—it would surely be a mistake to avoid the terminology of the period, all the more because a degree of prejudice or ambivalence is implicit in the term ‘antiquary’ to begin with.<sup>6</sup> Hönes’s consistent use of *Antiquar* throughout his study therefore makes good sense, but it should be noted that the connotations of the German word *are* somewhat different. Its modern sense, which dates back at least to the nineteenth century, is ‘dealer in antiquities’, most often in old books specifically—which is certainly appropriate for Hönes’s third protagonist, Christie (who ran the famous auction house founded by his father, James Christie Sr). My subjective impression is that the term is less widely used by eighteenth-century German antiquaries themselves, whether pejoratively or not (the explicitly pejorative *Alterthümmler*, as Hönes notes in passing, was also available to them)—so an explicit discussion of the usage of *Antiquar* in German would have been very welcome.<sup>7</sup> The term is certainly appropriate to the English and

<sup>5</sup> Vickers, ‘Value and Simplicity: A Historical Case’, in *Artful Crafts: Ancient Greek Silverware and Pottery*, ed. Vickers and David Gill, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994, 1-32.

<sup>6</sup> On ambivalent usage of the term in English, see Jonah Siegel, ‘Mere Antiquarianism’, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (2014).  
<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/antiquarianism/praxis.antiquarianism.2014.siegel.html>.  
Accessed 13 August 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Alterthumsforscher* and related terms do appear in Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1854), but *Antiquar* does not—perhaps because of its Latinity?  
<http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=alterthumsforscher>. Accessed 13 August 2015.

(secondarily) French contexts with which Hönes is concerned, however, and it helps to convey his positive revaluation of these three antiquaries' work.

Following the media theorist Wolfgang Ernst, another important influence on this book, Hönes takes his protagonists' shared emphasis on survivals as a reaction against historicism, a strategy for gaining the 'sovereignty' identified in his subtitle and glossed in the introduction as a 'right of disposal over past events' [*Verfügungsgewalt über das Geschehen*] (14). (Hönes also shares with Ernst the emphasis on British antiquarianism specifically, which makes sense because of d'Hancarville's long-standing association with British connoisseurs—but at the same time he engages very broadly with the literature and philosophy of the European Enlightenment, and this breadth is one of the great pleasures of the book.) He hastens to add that the collective interest in survivals should not be taken as evidence of a movement or an ideology, since all three of his antiquaries proceeded by 'interpreting the opponent's most essential source material in a sense systematically contrary to [the latter's] intention' (15). In d'Hancarville's case, the most important *Gegner* [opponent, interlocutor, precursor] of this *Gegengeschichte* was Winckelmann, so Hönes argues, and for Knight and Christie it was d'Hancarville himself. Hönes places a revisionist emphasis on these contrarian, arbitrary tendencies in part to secure himself—somewhat defensively, it seems to me—against an affiliation with the history of ideas (15, cf. 274). To elaborate the topos of *Gegengeschichten* one step further, I would say that a significant portion of this book's value lies precisely in its contribution to the history of ideas. After all, the *longue durée* here is marked not by a chain of influence but by a transformation over time of conjectural, 'unscientific' histories into scientific narratives. Hence the profoundly altered evolutionary concept of 'survivals' instantiates the deracination described by the theory itself.

In gaining sovereignty 'over objects and their history, combining and recombining them', Hönes declares, these antiquaries take the limit or endpoint of 'positivist history' as their starting point (16). The somewhat anachronistic use of 'positivism' here points forward to the inheritors of this dissenting antiquarian legacy, Aby Warburg and Sigmund Freud (25-31). One of the strongest points of the introduction is a substantial engagement with the doctrine of survivals as it is handed down, via Edward Tylor and evolutionary theory, to Warburg and Freud, who might be considered anti-positivist in a stricter sense. By tracing this legacy, Hönes captures one of the truly remarkable contributions of his three antiquaries (d'Hancarville particularly), which was to open a theoretical space for prehistory before it was explicitly named by Christian Jürgensen Thomsen and others (19, cf. 96, 180, and *passim*). The theorists of historicism in Hönes's sense of the term—Winckelmann as well as Gibbon and their common influence Antoine-Yves Goguet—insisted, by contrast, on the impenetrability of origins (21). Following Hayden White, Hönes defines the topos of the origin of art—embodied most famously in visual treatments of the Maid of Corinth—as a 'metahistorical fiction', recognized by Denis Diderot among other Enlighteners as an emblem (*Sinnbild*) of

the anthropological basis for art-making (22-23). The antiquarian insistence on origins, Hönes argues, is therefore ultimately antifoundational, an identification of the past with the present via the process of art-making. In tracing this history forward, Hönes notes that Warburg's *Nachleben* originated as a translation of the English 'survival', and makes the excellent point (contra Peter Geimer) that Freud's seemingly very different *Nachträglichkeit* actually also refers to content ostensibly imprinted at the moment of origins, with no connotation of belatedness (29).

Having established that stories about the origin of art serve a whole range of purposes quite distinct from describing the actual origins of art, Hönes is in a good position to gloss a frankly arbitrary episode in d'Hancarville, halfway through a major treatise, in which he declares all his previously stated opinions null and void. This figure of a *Wende*—a complete change of mind about the foundations of art and art-making, and hence antiquarian self-reinvention—becomes a leitmotif for the chapters on Knight (164-65) and Christie (185) as well. D'Hancarville, certainly the most flamboyant of the three, declares his past self dead—meaning the author of the first two volumes of his *Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities*—in order to launch an ambitious new origin story in the last two volumes. In this instance, *Gegengeschichte* is directed by the author against himself. In a rewarding close reading of this passage at the beginning of d'Hancarville's third volume (probably composed in 1773), Hönes also devotes substantial attention to the monument that d'Hancarville, in effect, erects for his past self. The image in question is an engraving reproduced on the cover of Hönes's book, showing a Roman funerary altar with an inscription mourning the death of 'd'Hancarville' (the preferred pseudonym of the commoner born as Pierre François Hugues).

In what seems to me to be an act of boldly speculative art history modeled on that of his subjects, Hönes interprets this object as a pedestal from which the statue has been removed (41).<sup>8</sup> As evidence he offers a richly suggestive intertext: the title page of Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744), which includes a Homeric figure on a pedestal or rostrum to symbolize the 'poetic' speech, and hence the communication by natural signs, practiced among the first humans (70-71). D'Hancarville's image of his own 'cenotaph' (the scare quotes are Hönes's, for reasons that will presently become clear) does at least four kinds of work for Hönes across his two chapters on this French theorist and client of English connoisseurs: it harnesses the art-historical power of the antiquary's own entry into antiquity through death, as associated especially with Winckelmann, to a counter-history that insists on the living presence of ancient art as against historical distance (33-41); it signals d'Hancarville's commitment to generatively 'arbitrary hypotheses', to cite the title of the second of these chapters, *Willkürliche Hypothesen*; by contrast with Vico's frontispiece, it also expresses his commitment to a doctrine of arbitrary signs

<sup>8</sup> Hönes gives no archaeological evidence for rejecting Ian Jenkins's interpretation of the object as a funerary altar. See Jenkins and Kim Sloan, eds., *Vases & Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection*, London: British Museum, 1996, 41.

that turns Vico's and other histories based on natural signs account 'on their heads' (70); and it symbolizes the acts of 'self-renewal' [*Selbsterneuerung*] to which Hönes attributes, in part, the sovereignty achieved by his protagonists over the prehistory that remained a blank unknown to more historically-minded inquirers.

Hönes's reading of this image and the associated text is richly suggestive in some respects and problematic in others. The image serves as a tailpiece to the 'preliminary discourse' of d'Hancarville's third volume, in which he writes, 'I think myself empowered to hold my former opinions, to be them of a man dead this long time', and promises a 'new science' as the outcome.<sup>9</sup> It makes good sense to associate the latter expression with Vico. Other scholars have only noted that d'Hancarville does not cite him explicitly, but an antiquary working in Naples in the 1760s could hardly ignore Vico, and Hönes's application of the principle of counter-history here begins to account for some of the strong thematic affinities between d'Hancarville's origin stories and Vico's. Hönes accurately conveys the rhetorical power of these and other acts of authorial self-fashioning. D'Hancarville also gives an empirical justification for his 'new science', however, that Hönes chooses to disregard. The author's corrective emphasis on the ancient 'monuments . . . that are extant' as opposed to 'ignorant guides', including his former self, who merely redact ancient texts about lost monuments, is not a passing rhetorical gesture. D'Hancarville reiterates this commitment to 'the monuments of art itself' (IV.vii) in a similarly constructed preface to the fourth volume, and both volumes engage much more explicitly with the monuments at hand, the vase paintings reproduced in the plates of all four volumes. In this way, the argument of all four volumes does build systematically, and it can be misleading to take d'Hancarville's declaration of his own death too literally. Hönes argues that this declaration allows d'Hancarville to make a decisive 'break' with Winckelmann as well, but presents very little in the way of textual evidence to support the notion that d'Hancarville's first two volumes are derivative of the German while the latter two are not. D'Hancarville is more concerned with exorcising Pliny than with exorcising Winckelmann in these volumes.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> D'Hancarville, *Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of Sir William Hamilton*, 4 vols, Naples: F. Morelli, 1766-1767 [1768-1776]), vol. 3, p. 3. Cited hereafter as *AEGR* (*AEGR* III.3).

<sup>10</sup> Although he takes pains to distance himself from Griener's emphasis on d'Hancarville's plagiarisms from Octavien de Guasco (74), Hönes does not go far enough to avoid repeating some of the other unexamined commonplaces about d'Hancarville. The idea that he saw himself as the 'anti-Winckelmann' (83, 257), as Ian Jenkins and David Constantine have also claimed, is an exaggeration and in fact an epiphenomenon of the very Winckelmann-centric historiography that Hönes sets out to challenge. (For d'Hancarville's critique of Pliny's 'superficial romance' of art history, see *AEGR* IV.iii-vii, 2, 13-14, 69-70, and 119). Another scholarly commonplace that Hönes endorses too readily is the idea that d'Hancarville never delivered on his promise to explicate the vase paintings in the collection because he was more interested in other things (61n97). Hönes twice claims that d'Hancarville's most

Hönes does offer a persuasive analysis of the argument of d'Hancarville's third and fourth volumes, and this analysis in turn provides the foundation for his account of arbitrary signs as they figure in the origin stories propounded by Knight and Christie as well. In these volumes, d'Hancarville formalizes the vocabulary that he uses to 'delineate the traces of the origins [of art] in the present' (46).<sup>11</sup> The original 'signs' or 'indications', according to this vocabulary, were aniconic. They were standing stones or tree stumps or other natural objects designated as memorials of past events. Over time, the 'sign' evolved into the 'figure' and historical events were recoded as myths, following a logic that Hönes helpfully situates in the context of euhemerism. The figurative representations of these (now often sacralized) events retained — or 'conserved', to use a key term of d'Hancarville's — 'traces of the ancient manner of representation', as Hönes (quoting d'Hancarville) explains (49).<sup>12</sup> These vestiges provide the 'infallible guides' to the infancy of art that d'Hancarville invokes during his moment of self-renewal, and this manner of interpretation enables him to 'posit arbitrary and intentional signs at the origin' in lieu of natural ones and the 'arcane wisdom' typically associated with them (51). Part of the thesis is that primitive artists themselves forgot this legacy, 'fetishizing' the figurative representations that grew out of the original, arbitrary signs (54). Intriguingly, Hönes chooses to illustrate this idea with reference to a discussion of 'Obotrite' monuments that later proved to be seventeenth-century forgeries. He suggests that these forgeries afforded stronger support for d'Hancarville's thesis than any genuinely ancient monuments or 'true history' could have done (53).

In keeping with his interpretation of d'Hancarville's 'self-renewal' through the fiction of his own death, Hönes reads 'the tension between determinative origins and arbitrary beginnings' [such as the Obotrite artifacts] as an 'ostentatious irony' (57). Thus he draws a parallel between the author's biography, marked by a trail of impostures and pseudonyms, and his historiography: 'instead of documenting history', d'Hancarville 'writes himself *into* the historical record and thereby *rewrites* nothing less than the course of history itself' (54).<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly these parallels undermine d'Hancarville's professed faith in the veracity of his source material, but by representing his professions as purely and inevitably ironic (61), Hönes

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sustained discussions of artworks are not about ancient objects at all (see esp. 258-59), but in fact his explications of several of the vase paintings in vol. 4, in a very small footnote font, are just as long (AEGR IV.28-59).

<sup>11</sup> 'Die Spur der Anfänge in der Gegenwart nachzuzeichnen ist hier d'Hancarville's Anliegen' (46).

<sup>12</sup> 'un reste de l'ancienne manière de représenter' (AEGR III.36 qtd. in Hönes 49).

<sup>13</sup> 'Statt Geschichte zu dokumentieren (wie es etwa die Mauriner taten) unternimmt er es, sich in das Geschehen selbst *ein-* und damit nicht[s] weniger als den Verlauf der Geschichte *umzuschreiben*' (54). Previous passage: 'diese Spannung zwischen determinierenden Ursprüngen und willkürlicher Neusetzung selbiger ist so offensichtlich, daß [sie] nur als eklatante Ironie gelesen werden kann' (57).

overstates the case somewhat. Nonetheless, there is strong suggestive power in this allegorical reading of d'Hancarville's authorial self-fashioning as an insistence that 'the historian is the origin of history', and in framing this reading Hönes offers a compelling explanation for d'Hancarville's and other antiquaries' ability to 'leap over the historical divide between past and present' (63). In this way, the origin of art becomes a figure for the original genius of the antiquary: 'the historiography of art, as an experimental or at least performative activity, thus becomes a simulation, executed and inspired by the antiquary's original genius.'<sup>14</sup>

As indicated by the intertextual constellation centring on Vico's account of the origin of language and symbol, Hönes's third chapter situates d'Hancarville in the context of eighteenth-century debates about signs and the relationship among images, ideas, and signs. Though admirably broad in its learning, this chapter becomes somewhat digressive in rehearsing a range of arguments (from Pausanias through Octavien de Guasco) concerning the origin of idolatry, later reinterpreted as 'animism' by Tylor in his explicitly prehistoric account of sacred images and survivals (78). This wide-ranging discussion, in the end, helps to clarify d'Hancarville's position concerning unformed stones and similar objects, namely that they were originally understood as arbitrary and intentional, purely 'abstract and mental' signs rather than natural manifestations of sacred meaning (78-79). Unformed or natural objects originally associated with a particular divinity continue to appear as 'survivals' in later figurative representations of the god and become 'epithets' of the figure, such as the trees serving as decorative elements in certain statues of Diana (81). While such hypotheses can only be mooted 'in fictional form', rendering art history a kind of 'experimental novel' (85), art history stands to gain from the substitution, in Hönes's view. By denying the naturalness of visual signs, he argues, d'Hancarville makes the origin of art accessible to discourse.

Formally, Hönes's treatment of Richard Payne Knight follows a similar pattern: a first long chapter offers close readings of a single primary work—in this case Knight's *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786)—enriched by substantive engagements with the author's biographical and cultural situation and with his antiquarian career. A second, more concise chapter situates the author's origin stories in relation to contemporary theories of the sign. The analysis is cumulative, especially because d'Hancarville influenced Knight (as well as Christie) so directly. In these chapters, however, Hönes's analysis is more contextual, displaying his overarching interest in London as an antiquarian centre, and in the Society of Dilettanti, to which Knight, Christie, and both of d'Hancarville's patrons, Hamilton and Townley, all belonged. This social milieu is foregrounded again in the last main

<sup>14</sup> 'Kunsthistoriographie, als experimentelle oder zumindest performative Tätigkeit, wird damit zu einer Simulation, durchgeführt und inspiriert durch das Originalgenie des Antiquars' (66). Previous passage: 'Der Historiker wird zur ersten Ursache der Geschichte. . . die historische Trennwand von Vergangem zu Gegenwärtigem [ist] übersprungen' (63).

chapter of the book, which includes an innovative interpretation of Johann Zoffany's painting of this antiquarian circle (244-48). Hönes makes good use of the recent books by Bruce Redford and Jason Kelly on the Society of Dilettanti, but it seems that he differentiates his own project implicitly from institutional history by focusing primarily on three individuals and their literary relations. In addition to being more thickly contextualized, the chapters on Knight and Christie also differ in emphasis, with more space given to motifs and subject matter associated with the origin of art than to explicit theories of origin.

Knight admired and responded to the *Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities* or *AEGR* (1766-76), and thematically his work bears an even closer resemblance to d'Hancarville's *Researches on the Origin, Spirit, and Progress of Greek Art* (1785), written while the Frenchman was in London and moving in the same circles as Knight. In this work (published only in French), d'Hancarville turns his full attention to the 'worship of the generative powers' (in Thomas Wright's phrase) and looks to it for the origins of both art and religion. In a chapter aptly titled 'The Potency of the Antiquary', Hönes responds to earlier scholarship by framing d'Hancarville's influence in a new way, again deploying the rubric of *Gegengeschichte*. Using some of the same evidence implicitly to overturn d'Hancarville's thesis of origin through arbitrary signs, Knight explains the origin of image-making via the phallus, 'the natural sign par excellence' (99). D'Hancarville himself, Hönes argues, also threw in his lot with the natural sign in this period (103), and it is small wonder that Knight's *Discourse* follows the *Recherches* 'very closely' in explaining the origin of images through resemblance and privileging the 'reproductive mediality' of coins and medals (104). In situating the arguments of d'Hancarville's new work in relation to Knight's, Hönes once again demonstrates his comprehensive knowledge of the Frenchman's capacious *oeuvre*.

Hönes certainly gives Knight his due, however, suggesting that the *Discourse* is ultimately driven by Knight's counter-historical impulse to write against d'Hancarville's earlier work (105). He frames their shared attention to the link between fertility cults and image-making as more of a joint project, 'a serious scientific pursuit' that might almost be described as network research, noting that Knight himself helped to finance the writing of d'Hancarville's *Recherches* (107).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 'Schon mit Hinblick auf d'Hancarville's *Recherches*, die ja von Townley und Knight finanziert wurden, dürfte deutlich werden, dass hier ein seriös gemeintes wissenschaftliches Anliegen dahinter stand' (107). Although this observation strongly implies the real difference in social status that rendered the class neutrality of antiquarian sociability a fiction, Hönes hardly alludes to it in this book. One relevant place for discussion of this issue would have been his treatment of an engraving of a bull breaking an egg from d'Hancarville's *Recherches*. Hönes reproduces the image (Fig 22), but does not mention that Knight commissioned d'Hancarville at this time to make a drawing of another ancient bronze featuring a bull, an image that wound up in Knight's own book — as we know from Horace Walpole's letter to Lady Ossory of 9 July 1785. It's more surprising that Hönes neglects entirely the most important primary source material on d'Hancarville's life, his

Hönes also displays an admirably broad command of Knight's work in this chapter, a more diverse body of writing that includes didactic poetry, aesthetic treatises, and much more. Reflecting this substantial literary output as well as Knight's greater social and political influence, there is a much larger body of scholarship on him than on d'Hancarville, and Hönes makes good use of this literature as well. His contribution will certainly be of value to scholars concerned with Knight.

Hönes acknowledges that other scholars on the trail of survivals, including Giancarlo Carabelli and Whitney Davis, have traced the connections between d'Hancarville's theory of survivals, Hamilton's discovery of a phallic cult of St. Cosmo in Isernia – supposedly a Priapic survival – and Knight's *Discourse*, which draws the relevant inferences (93). Hönes's contribution, in keeping with his larger argument, is to focus on the origin story that Knight deduces from Hamilton's discovery of phallic wax ex-votos being used, with the sanction of the Catholic Church, in a rural part of modern Italy. Such survivals, in this case inherited directly from the ancient cult of Priapus, are more the rule than the exception – it's just that there can be no mistaking the origin of the symbol in this case. As 'symbols of symbols', in Knight's phrase, all pictures have their origin – most often obscured in modern times – in prior symbols produced in imitation of natural objects by the 'imitative animal', man (93-94). Other 'obscene' images, including some in Gothic churches, now seem to lie further along the chain of replication. Hönes argues convincingly that this origin story is diametrically opposed to d'Hancarville's idea of originally aniconic signs later surviving only in the context of figurative representations (100).

The last two-thirds of this long first chapter on Knight turn from the origins of art, and from close readings, to the subject matter of sexuality – the generative powers from the primitive and universal 'worship' of which all symbols originated (98) – and the many discursive frames that come to bear on it in late eighteenth-century England: anti-clerical and especially anti-Catholic satyr/satire (105-111); the controversy surrounding obscenity and 'sexualized iconography' more generally (117), which Hönes sees as overblown, particularly in some scholarly accounts (111-125); and the 'hermeticism' that characterizes both the practices of sexualized subcultures such as the Dilettanti and the hieroglyphic difficulty of the archaic symbolism encoded in images (125-137). The 'potency of the antiquary' in its widest sense resides in his special priest-like power of unlocking this symbolism.

This wide-ranging contextualization touches on representations of Priapic and/or Bacchic rites in eighteenth-century prints and paintings, ancient cameos, and antiquarian treatises such as Charles Dupuis' *Origine de tous les cultes* (1794). It also takes in the images and attitudes cultivated by secret societies affiliated with the Dilettanti, such as the Hell-Fire Club (132-34). The goal of this survey is to offer a 'perspective' from which Knight may be seen as 'a new Hermes Trismegistus who

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correspondence as edited by Pascal Griener, much of which details his constant struggle to stay afloat.

watches over the mysteries of pictorial tradition' (135). Hönes also draws on later work by Knight such as *Specimens of Antient Sculpture* (1809) to show the evolution of his treatment of some of these mysteries, including the iconography of hermaphroditic and androgynous figures. The chapter is enriched by twenty-three illustrations, including several reproductions of fashionable paintings confirming — if somewhat more decorously than Knight's engravings — that Priapic imagery was common and not particularly 'scandalous' (115). Reproductions of ancient cameos attest to the prevalence of 'dionysian themes', including 'phallic iconography', in antiquity; these motifs, he states, feature on 'at least 90%' of ancient cameos (117-18).

Hönes's note cites a recent article on ancient glass, which presumably supports this high estimate, but all the same there is a sense that he is glossing over some of the finer details in this very wide-ranging discussion. The cameo pictured here is not properly identified, and in many cases the captions give no clue as to the identity of ancient artifacts depicted in eighteenth-century illustrations or copies, such as the otherwise unspecified 'Neapolitan antiquity' copied in terracotta by Joseph Nollekens (Fig. 29). The appended image credits (327) are very sparse as well. The figures are well-chosen and numerous, but often so greatly reduced that it is impossible to make a judgment on Hönes's interpretations, such as the 'ithyphallic torch' he locates in Joshua Reynolds's *Three Ladies Adoring a Term of Hymen* (Fig. 34; reproduced at 6 x 5 cm) or the pedestal of the 'true Homer' at the centre (?) of Vico's frontispiece (the postage-stamp size Fig. 19). If the publisher couldn't be more generous, or Hönes more selective, the production editor might have encouraged them to meet in the middle. This book postdates Hönes's dissertation by only a year. It is a genuinely erudite work of scholarship, but a longer gestation time would have allowed a more selective and refined presentation not only of illustrations but also of evidence, structure, and prose style.

The second chapter on Knight, dedicated to the idea of sounds as natural signs, swerves even more rapidly from one source to the next, from a painting of Homer commissioned by Knight, to Homeric themes in visual culture, to conjectural history, to Knight's book on the Greek alphabet, to theories and histories of writing and hieroglyphics by Antoine Court de Gébelin, Franciscus van Helmont, William Warburton, and others. As in several other chapters, there is no clear metanarrative that synthesizes this wealth of material into the argument and there is very little connective tissue between discussions of sources to indicate where the argument is moving.

One virtue of the chapters on Knight is that both begin with vivid, lapidary anecdotes making for elegant transitions into the main subject (91, 145). The second of these concerns the Thomas Lawrence painting commissioned by Knight in 1791, *Homer Reciting His Poems* — a rich field for pursuing the origin of the arts in the context of the origin of society (a subject also closely related to *The Progress of Civil Society*, the didactic poem that Knight published five years later). The chapter's argument, which engages closely with Knight's production of an original, 'purified' Greek alphabet from the *Iliad* in 1791 (145-56), concerns a turn [*Wende*] in his

thinking that occurred later when he relocated the moment of origin from a historical figure, Homer, to a mythical one, Orpheus (164). The Homeric project, Hönes argues, aimed to make it possible for a modern reader to ‘sing like Homer’ (151). This compelling instance of a ‘survival’ differs sharply from those produced by d’Hancarville, but illustrates equally well the insistence on afterlife versus decline that is the burden of Hönes’s larger argument. His local argument here about the turn in Knight’s self-fashioning is less successful. It is intended to illustrate, once again, the absolute ‘command over the origin of art’ achieved by the positing and re-positing of contradictory and ‘unattainable’ origins (158), but the Orphic moment depends heavily on a hermeneutic contrast between Lawrence’s Homer and a later painting of Orpheus by William Westall, another protégé of Knight’s (Fig. 51). While this narrative presents the compelling idea of a recognition that the true origin is lost in the absolute mythic past (*Vorzeit*), neither the contrast between the paintings nor Knight’s later references to Orpheus, as cited by Hönes, provide direct evidence of a substitution. It seems fair to conclude that in this instance, Hönes offers something like an allegory of antiquarian self-fashioning accompanied by an intriguing theoretical proposition: the original sound of Homer loses itself in the deep time [*Tiefenzeit*] of images (159).

The next episode of Hönes’s *Gegengeschichte*—Christie contra d’Hancarville and Knight—relocates the primal scene of art decisively from the theater of myth back to that of history, specifically natural history: all art commemorates the Deluge (178). The chapter title refers to the Noachian flood as ‘the trauma of sacred history’, but in introducing the natural history of the deluge, always closely entwined with sacred history in any case, Hönes here brings to bear the final conceptual element in the overarching framework of the book. His next chapter—the first of a suite of three thematic chapters that concludes the book—is also devoted to natural history. Unlike d’Hancarville and Knight, Christie was directly influenced by a natural historian, Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger. Based on his observations of fossils, Boulanger became convinced of the historicity of the deluge and broadly construed the arts of antiquity as memorials to this event, or rather survivals of such memorials (180). Christie, offended by Knight’s ‘marginalization’ of sacred history (168), saw in Boulanger’s paradigm an opportunity to recode many images of interest to his fellow Dilettanti in Judeo-Christian terms (187-91). Following d’Hancarville, Christie takes ancient vase paintings to be illustrations of the Eleusinian and other mysteries. The content of those mysteries, however, in Christie’s reading, is derived from the flood and its aftermath. The geological record helps to secure this account, but as Hönes rightly notes, neither Christie nor Boulanger are interested in using geological time to gain access to prehistory (180); their interest lies in the historicity of post-diluvial civilization, including the antediluvian survivals preserved by it.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> It should be added that one subsequent theorist of the earth did use Boulanger’s paradigm to effect a temporalization of prehistory, namely Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, in

Although he is diffident and at times openly sceptical about Christie's merits as a theorist, Hönes makes an excellent contribution by offering the first scholarly account of this substantial body of antiquarian work. Again he contrasts an earlier work with a later one to illuminate his larger themes of survivals, *Gegengeschichte*, antiquarian self-fashioning, and above all the 'sovereign' positing and re-positing of metafictional origins. In this case, Hönes observes a historiographic turn [*Wende*] in the revisions that transformed Christie's privately printed *Disquisition upon Etruscan Vases* (1806) into the expanded *Disquisitions upon the painted Greek vases and their probable connection with the shows of the Eleusinian and other mysteries* of 1825 (185). In addition to reinterpreting the content of the mysteries, Christie also reinterpreted their form, reasoning from the silhouette-like appearance especially evident on black-figure vases that the mysteries they document were akin to large-scale magic-lantern shows, and that vase painters were hired to 'trace . . . these phantasmagoric shadow projections' (173) onto vases that could be interred with initiates of the cult when they died (178). Christie's formal attention to vase paintings under the d'Hancarvillean rubric of grave goods for initiates also led to a tabular classification of the forms of vases that is generally regarded as his more lasting contribution.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately this chapter provides more troubling evidence of a hasty revision process in the form of a whole paragraph repeated verbatim both at the beginning (167) and at the end (171-72) of the opening section of this chapter. The repetition points to a kind of uncertainty or incompleteness in those sections where the reader might expect to find a larger frame for the argument being constructed. There are other instances of redundancy, including the insistent reminder, appearing almost every time a work or idea is cited again, that it has been cited previously—as though the reader can't be trusted to make that out for himself. There are some errors of fact, including the strange suggestion that Samuel Richardson wrote a letter twenty-three years after his death (85) and the conflation of Captain Cook's first two voyages (231). Presumably the publisher and not the author is to blame for a more substantial weakness in this book, its lack of an index. This is quite disabling in a book that covers such a vast range of material.

Because Christie interprets the myth of the Maid of Corinth in light of his thesis that vase paintings, too, are tracings of shadows (176), Hönes takes his thesis as a thesis about the origin of painting (cf. 173), but the association is so crucial to the argument that an explicit quotation to this effect is needed to seal the case. It's entirely clear that Christie makes the flood an occasion for the origin of arts in general, and Hönes develops helpful close readings of passages in which Christie

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*Epochs of Nature*. This aspect of Boulanger's legacy could help to link this chapter to Hönes's next chapter on 'de-temporalization.' See further Buffon, *Les Époques de la Nature*, ed. Jacques Roger, Paris: Editions du Museum, 1962, xxxiv-vi.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth adding one more reference to Hönes's generally strong intertextual account in this chapter. D'Hancarville first put forward the idea of vases as grave goods for initiates in *AEGR* IV.31-49, esp. 38.

traces survivals of water images across vast art historical distances. The pointed arches of the Gothic, for example, ‘naturally derive from “the ornament of the Nymphaea lotus”’ (183). The mocking tone of ‘naturally’ and certain other passages is, however, a regrettable expression of the otherwise understandable impulse to establish critical distance between oneself and one’s author. This long chapter boasts a better integrated contextual framework, highlights of which include Erasmus Darwin’s *The Loves of the Plants*, another hermetic work that adopts the conceit of a ‘show’ of transparencies (193), and, more centrally, the performances of the natural philosopher Adam Walker, who made spectacular use of projections in his lectures on astronomy (194-96). By using this vocabulary and the corresponding affect of original genius—so Hönes concludes this chapter—Christie fashioned himself as a ‘hierophant’ of images in the tradition of d’Hancarville and Knight. The chapter also features strong intertextual analysis of all three writers, in one case vividly summarizing Christie’s differences from both predecessors: ‘Neither the written word, nor unformed stones, nor (especially) the adoration of the sex organs constitute Christie’s scene of origins, but rather the deluge, at once an episode in sacred history and in earth history.’<sup>18</sup>

Having broached the relationship between natural history and the historiography of art, Hönes has good reason to move on to the broader implications for art history of what is sometimes called ‘the time revolution’, and he does so in the next chapter, ‘De-Temporalization: Survivals and Natural History.’<sup>19</sup> While Hönes shows admirable breadth of knowledge on this extensive topic, producing a narrative that reads like a very polished classroom lecture on early geology, he loses sight of the larger arc of the book amid these details. He argues here that the theory of survivals at this stage did not partake of the ‘temporalization’ of the natural world most famously narrated in Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, but rather dwelled within the static post-diluvial geology laid down previously by Thomas Burnet and other seventeenth-century theorists. The argument is not successfully integrated into the larger argument of the book, partly because the broad issues it raises are not easily contained in one short chapter, and the reader is left without any guidance through what seems to be a major transition in the book, from five chapters about individual ‘protagonists’ to three chapters about ideas. One clue to the structural role of this material comes with the claim that the ‘repudiation of natural history’ removes the origins of art to the present, where the antiquary can reign supreme as ‘sole sovereign’ (215).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Nicht das geschriebene Wort, nicht ungeformte Steine und schon garnicht die Verehrung der Geschlechtsteile sind Christies Ursprungsszene, sondern die Sintflut, ein heilgeschichtliches Ereignis und [eine] erdgeschichtliche Revolution zugleich’ (192).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Entzeitlichung: Nachleben und Naturgeschichte.’ For one relevant account of the ‘time revolution’, see Daniel Lord Smail and Andrew Shryock, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, Berkeley: U of California P, 2011, 5-6, 23-24.

The evidence that Hönes's three protagonists do repudiate natural history in this sense remains implicit at best, and there are problems with the explicit argument as well. He premises a dominant account in which an 'art history' in the process of professionalization—as embodied by Winckelmann—affiliated itself with 'biology' (200). Hönes makes a helpful contrast between Winckelmann's interest in (and for) the progressive or dynamic natural history represented by Buffon, on the one hand, and Christie's affiliation with the ahistorical, tabular order of nature represented by Carolus Linnaeus. But the 'two cultures' rubric associated with modern terms such as biology and art history is anachronistic, and it was equally typical for natural history and antiquarianism to be practiced by the same authors, including Sir William Hamilton, Joseph Banks, and other figures discussed in this book. It's clear that the chapter puts in place certain conditions of possibility needed for the theory of survivals to flourish—namely, static natural history, universal or monogenetic human history, and materialism or 'atomism'—but neither the relation of these pieces to each other nor the structural reason for the change in approach from individual authors (chapters 2-5) to clusters of ideas (ch. 6-9)—from close to distant reading, relatively speaking—are adequately clear.

The next chapter offers another set of distant readings with minimal guidance as to where the argument is going. The historiographic emphasis in this chapter is on the synoptic quality (*Übersichtlichkeit*) of the antiquaries' view across cultures and across time, a view that tends to collapse historical and cultural distance. The issue is crucial, since the history of these comparisons helps to explain both the syncretism of d'Hancarville's, Knight's and Christie's accounts and the gradual transformation of their premises into the 'comparative method' of social science. In a rapid survey of the writings of J. B. Séroux d'Agincourt, J.-F. Lafitau, José Acosta, Georg Forster, and Sir William Hamilton (among others), Hönes assembles a rich array of materials on human antiquity to complement the 'de-temporalization' associated with natural history in the previous chapter. Characteristically, Hönes traces an Enlightenment motif—in this case, the conflation of 'ancient' with 'primitive' peoples—back to an early modern source, insisting on the persistence of what might be termed the 'non-modern' idea of survivals. Because of the large scope and rapid pace of the survey, however, the intended contrast between this tradition and the nominally 'biological' idea of progress and decline seems overstated and inaccurate. In this case, Hönes makes the vulgar error of placing Forster and Joseph Banks on the same Pacific voyage (231) in order to support a flimsy reading of Hamilton as a 'stadial' theorist of 'progress' (233) in diametrical opposition to the synchronism of d'Hancarville et al.

In the last substantive chapter, Hönes again allows himself adequate space to clarify the argument. Developing the previous chapter's discussion of Lafitau and his tradition, he explains that rejecting the narrative of progress and decline means viewing 'history as a tableau' in which objects from multiple contexts are simultaneously present (235). Given the abundance of continental material informing this paradigm, it is still not fully clear why this 'ahistorical and synoptic

perspective' should be 'especially typical for England', but the connection between making present [*Vergegenwärtigung*] and the theory of survivals is clear and convincing.<sup>20</sup> This synchronic approach transforms progressive history into a kind of Gordian knot, the tangled ball of yarn evoked by the chapter's expressive title, *Verwicklungen*, meaning 'entanglements' or 'intricacy' — the latter being the definition that Hönes quotes from a German-English dictionary of 1793. This definition allows him to place two English theorists, William Hogarth and Sir Joshua Reynolds, at the head of this chapter's narrative. Hönes's interpretation of two watercolors by Joseph Gandy (with two related images) illustrates the persistence of the synoptic approach well into the nineteenth century, along with the 'survival' of particular motifs, including the sacred images emphasized by d'Hancarville, Knight, and Christie (240).

Making a virtuosic leap of his own, Hönes now compares the frontispiece of Lafitau's book (1724), which features ancient and 'primitive' artifacts assembled ready to hand in a scholar's study, with Johann Zoffany's painting of 1783, *Charles Townley in His Library*. In a strong analysis, Hönes points out that the many marbles and other ancient objects assembled in this interior constitute, like those in Lafitau, a kind of pastiche—the scale and size of many objects are freely altered and the composition includes many objects that were never actually displayed in the space: 'art accommodates itself to the scholarly space, and not vice versa' (246). Although d'Hancarville appears at a writing desk in the centre of this painting, there seems to be no relation between his theory and the objects; for Hönes, Zoffany thus captures the ultimately painterly logic of synoptic art history as well as the sovereign 'license' of the collector, in this case Townley, who sits serenely reading in the right foreground. Having situated this argument about Townley and his circle in relation to the theory (especially Joseph Spence's *Polymetis*) and practice (especially the 'restoration' of antiquities) associated with connoisseurship, Hönes returns to d'Hancarville for a strong conclusion. Noting d'Hancarville's elaborate ekphrastic response to Raphael's *The School of Athens*, in the midst of a work supposedly about ancient art, Hönes argues that synoptic art history does not take artworks in a historical sense but rather as 'guarantors' of the survival of more ancient traces (259). Empathetic identification, he notes, is crucial for this type of interpretation and serves as a 'strategy for repressing temporality.'<sup>21</sup> The chapter ends with a sort of coda, entitled 'Cock and Bull Stories', in which Hönes signals his primarily formal interest in survival as a type of narrative. A surprising and effective comparison

<sup>20</sup> 'In diesem Kapitel geht es um diesen, vielleicht gerade für England typischen Umgang mit Kunstgeschichte, der die Bilder unter einer ahistorischen und synoptischen Perspektive betrachtet' (235).

<sup>21</sup> 'Die zentrale Konsequenz dieser Einfühlung, die gerade keine historische Distanz mehr kennt, wäre, daß sie als Strategie zur Unterdrückung von Zeitlichkeit betrachtet werden kann' (260). The idea that d'Hancarville is more interested in Raphael than in ancient vase painting is, however, an overstatement.

between the art historical narratives and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* provides a new illustration of this approach (269-70). The prehistoric scene of origin, in the end, creates a space for the free play of the author's subjectivity.<sup>22</sup>

By making positive claims about the origins of art, Hönes argues, d'Hancarville, Knight, and Christie arrogated the right to a kind of interpretive mastery (*Deutungshoheit*), establishing authority through authorship (273). They also claimed to be inaugurating the true history of art, but in Hönes's view this dimension of their work is secondary because the competing claims of Winckelmann became canonical for the construction of an objective art history. Hönes's conclusion clarifies the distinction between these two lineages by associating his protagonists not with present-day art historians but with media theorists: their choice of 'coins, as an intrinsically reproductive medium, as the germ of "survivals"' supports a description of their art historical practice as 'proto-media-theory' (274). It may be that art history is a hall of mirrors (as Hönes claims, following Joseph Imorde), but more attention to the objective dimension of this counter-tradition in art history would help, I think, to clarify a distinction that certainly bears on the argument: is d'Hancarville and company's insistence on origins itself a historiography of art, or simply a new kind of art historical writing, and hence an object of historiographic inquiry? Inasmuch as the latter is the case, it would help to see more direct engagement, here at the end, with the received histories of the discipline against which Hönes is writing.

Hönes's larger point in this conclusion, 'What is a Survival?' [*Was ist Nachleben?*], and the reason for his resistance to the idea of 'influence' and the history of ideas, is that an entirely different origin story is presupposed by the theory of survivals after Darwin. Archaeologists making post-Darwinian versions of the argument for survivals, such as John Evans, become affiliated here with the evolutionary approach to art history that Hönes distinguishes sharply from the synchronic, synoptic approach associated with Warburg (275-76). The lessons offered by the 'metahistorical chess board' (280) on which d'Hancarville, Knight, and Christie performed their moves are 1) that the origin assigned for images—standing stones, alphabetic characters, or naturalistic shadows—depends on whether visual signs are conceived as essentially natural or essentially arbitrary

<sup>22</sup> Hönes notes Sterne's invocation of the Horatian tag 'beginning from the egg' and there is a nice parallel in one of the title vignettes in d'Hancarville's 'catalogue' of Hamilton's vases, which features the corresponding Latin inscription (*AEGR* I.112). It's not entirely clear that d'Hancarville saw himself—as Sterne certainly did—as deliberately deferring the beginning of his story. At one point he declared that the ostensible purpose of cataloguing Hamilton's vases was only a pretext anyway, boasting to Hamilton, 'I have written a very good book on the pretext of writing a catalogue.' This and d'Hancarville's remaining letters are included as Appendix 1 in Pascal Griener, *Le Antichità Etrusche Greche e Romane 1766-1776 di Pierre Hugues d'Hancarville*, Rome: Edizione dell'Elefante, 1992, 118-44, here 140.

(277) and 2) that therefore the events of history themselves are produced by the writing of history, which is in this sense performative (280).

Hönes's thorough engagement with these three authors, supported by a truly impressive range of contextual materials as well as by thoughtful interventions in contemporary art historical debates, explains the surprising resonance of their writings in a postmodern and perhaps postdisciplinary climate. The author's exuberant and polymathic engagement with ancient and early modern sources also distinguishes this work from other studies that are more confined within the boundaries of the eighteenth century. *Kunst am Ursprung* is both a valuable contribution to scholarship on Enlightenment transformations of art history and a provocative commentary on the history of the discipline as a whole.

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