



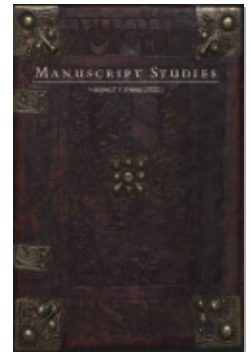
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*Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts from Ancient  
Mesopotamia to Modern China* by Cécile Michel and Michael  
Friedrich (review)

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most part, British authors, but does not explicitly consider the ways that discourse on artifacts may have fueled or been fueled by nationalism, empire, and colonialism in an era in which each of these played a major role in political and social thought. Given the wide range of material that Lake manages here, it is perhaps inevitable that *Artifacts* raises some questions that it does not answer, and it is much to be hoped that these questions will be explored—by Lake or by other scholars—in future work.

Nevertheless, understood on its own terms, *Artifacts* makes a clear intervention, demonstrating a pervasive (if not universal) connection between material objects and political discourse. In doing so, it offers a valuable new perspective on the long life of artifacts, and important critical perspective on the ways in which objects can signify far beyond their immediate context. It does this with remarkable clarity both synchronically, as it argues for the ways in which writing about artifacts and antiquities participated in English politics and literature, and diachronically, as it offers readings that explicitly connect contemporary thought to eighteenth-century texts. At a moment when we are keenly aware of the non-neutrality of museums, libraries, and curricula for study of the past, *Artifacts* offers fresh insight into the post-medieval discourses that shaped those institutions and the objects that they hold today.

Cécile Michel and Michael Friedrich, eds. *Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern China*. Studies in Manuscript Cultures 20. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. 344 pp., 82 color and black and white ill. €99,95. ISBN: 9783110714227.

KELLY TUTTLE

THE OPEN ACCESS COLLECTION, edited by Cécile Michel and Michael Friedrich, is a broad, entertaining, and thought-provoking set of thirteen chapters exploring different aspects of the production and reception of faked written artifacts. These artifacts include cuneiform tablets, inscribed

altars, and other objects, and a wide variety of manuscripts from Europe, China, and the Islamic world.

The work begins with a thorough introduction by Cécile Michel and Michael Friedrich in which they introduce terminology and give an overview of the contents. According to the introduction, the collection is “aimed at understanding the subtle distinctions conveyed by a developed vocabulary related to the reproduction of ancient artefacts and the production of artefacts claiming to be ‘old’: from copies and replicas to fakes and forgeries” (3). The collection leaves the reader pondering not only the vocabularies, but the motives and the reception of the forgeries as well. In reading the collection, it is easy to forget about the focus on vocabulary and refining our means of talking about fakes and just be taken in by the stories, many of which are fascinating accounts. A theme that runs prominently through the collection is the practice of producing fakes for revising history or for filling in perceived gaps where content cannot be found, but where the forger would like it to be found. The reasons prompting that type of fake are varied, but it appears in many of the chapters.

The collection is divided into three sections, though the sections overlap in many ways, and some chapters fit as well in one section as they do in another. The first section, “From Copies to Forgeries,” deals mostly with distinguishing among copy types. These include copies written by students and scribes, both ancient and modern, copies meant to deceive (that is, fakes) and fakes produced with potential legal ramifications (that is, forgery) (7). The first section contains four chapters, ranging widely in chronology and geography, covering Mesopotamia, France, China, and the Islamic world. Cécile Michel’s chapter “Cuneiform Fakes: A Long History from Antiquity to the Present Day” is particularly rich as it takes the reader through both ancient and modern fakes, their receptions, and the possible motives behind their creation, which, as with most of the items discussed in this collection, are monetary, scholarly, or political. In the case of Mesopotamian fakes, all three motives apply.

The second section, “Forgers and Their Motives,” is distinguished by the fact that we know who the forger was for each of the cases in the section and the putative motives behind their forgeries. The first two chapters, Ekkehard Weber’s “Fake Ancient Roman Inscriptions and the Case of Wolfgang Lazius

(1514–1565)” and Olivier Gengler’s “Michel Fourmont and His Forgeries,” each show a forger who forged because they could not find, among the artifacts at hand, what they wanted to see. Fourmont, for example, had been sent on a mission to Greece to collect manuscripts in 1729–30, but failing in that, he ended up collecting hundreds of copies of inscriptions. As Gengler says, “They would normally have amounted to a major scholarly contribution—at least from our modern point of view—if Fourmont had not forged around thirty of these texts” (127). Gengler speculates that Fourmont “initially succumbed to the temptation to see what he wanted to see in the texts he copied: the famous Sparta of archaic times” (145). Similarly, Weber argues that Lazius forged because “he felt he had to forge an inscription if a suitable one did not happen to be readily available” (118). In the end, both forgers wanted to see a different history than they were seeing and so took to invention in order to create it and fill a supposed gap.

This desire for a different history is similar to the motives that we see for fakes in at least three other chapters of the collection—namely, the two chapters about Abraham Firkowicz and the chapter about the Lead Books of the Sacromonte. Each of these is a fascinating read, and the fakes were created for largely the same reason: to modify the historical record and by doing so improve the lives of a minority group. In the case of the Firkowicz fakes, the forgery was done to convince the Russian government that the Karaite Jews had been living in Crimea far longer than they had been. The second forgery case of revisionist history was on behalf of the Christian converts of Arab descent living in Spain after the Reconquista, who wanted to convince the government to fully accept them.

For readers unfamiliar with Firkowicz’s case, Malachi Beit-Arie’s chapter, “Supplement: The Forgery of Colophons and Ownership of Hebrew Codices and Scrolls by Abraham Firkowicz,” is an excellent introduction to his story, both as a forger and as a collector of Hebrew manuscripts. The inscriptions and paratexts he forged “paved the way for the emancipation of the Russian Karaites, who, according to the alleged documentary evidence, lived in Russia long before Jesus was born and had therefore played no part in the crucifixion, renouncing all connections with Jews and Judaism. Thanks to his efforts, the Russian Karaites received full civic liberty in 1863” (204). Dan Shapiro’s chapter, “Et tout le reste est littérature, or: Abraham

Firkowicz, the Writer with a Chisel,” looks in more detail at how Firkowicz forged inscriptions and manufactured dates that gave the Karaites in Crimea their extra-long history.

As for the Lead Books, Claudia Colini explains in “La invención del Sacromonte: How and Why Scholars Debated About the Lead Books of Granada for Two Hundred Years” that members of several prominent Morisco families in Granada apparently created (and must have also hidden) twenty-one miniature lead books written in Arabic in the caves of Mount Valparaíso. The books were then discovered between 1595 and 1599. It seems the books were made to prove that Arabic was a Christian language and to present the Arabs “as the first group converted to Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula, implicitly suggesting that the Moriscos present in Spain in the fifteenth century were the descendants of these first converts” (214). Colini’s chapter is particularly fascinating as it deals with an intricate and long-lived forgery that is still not entirely resolved even today (211). After their discovery, the lead books were sent to the Vatican for analysis and remained hidden there from 1682, when they were banned, to 2000, when they were returned to Sacromonte Abbey. Today, they remain unpublished and difficult to see in person. Colini also includes two useful appendices: a timeline of events, and an annotated list of participants (there are many) in the creation and debate about the books.

Although Colini’s chapter is in the third section of the collection, “Identifying Fakes,” it fits just as well into the second section since it deals with the who and why of forgery as much as the how of discovery. The other three chapters that make up the final segment deal more plainly with a structured attempt to unmask fakes. Ira Rabin and Oliver Hahn, in their chapter “Detection of Fakes: The Merits and Limits of Non-Invasive Materials Analysis,” look at the kinds of natural science tests one can perform and how useful they are, or are not, as the case often is, for determining if one is looking at a fake written artifact. Jost Gippert’s chapter, “Identifying Fakes: Three Case Studies with Examples from Different Types of Written Artefacts,” also explores how to detect fakes. The examples he chooses are an inscription on a brooch, rolled single-leaf leather manuscripts (“cigarillos”), and an inscribed slate sherd. In the first case, the inscription was considered real, then fake, and now real again (266). The “cigarillos,” discovered

twenty years ago to be written in a language no one had ever seen, have fallen by the wayside (272). Lastly, the sherd is what Gippert calls “a classic self-revealing fake” (263). Fakes often reveal themselves because of what we might think of as over-invention, such as trying to create a new language or new alphabet, or in the case of the sherd, inscribing the item with modern letterforms (274). These self-revealing fakes also appear in several of the contributions in the first part of the collection. Finally, Michael Friedrich’s concluding chapter, “Producing and Identifying Forgeries of Chinese Manuscripts,” also treats the idea of what Gippert calls “the interplay of linguistics, philology, archaeology and ‘hard’ sciences,” this time in relation to unprovenanced bamboo-slip manuscripts held in Chinese state institutions (275). We find that trying to lay down rules or procedures for determining fakes is a tricky business since forgers have a variety of ways of creating their fakes, and what works to determine one type of fake will not necessarily work with another.

Since this collection is open source, it may be downloaded as a complete collection or as individual chapters. The collection is worth reading, but since the chapters range so very widely in time and place, it seems more likely readers will want to read only those chapters that are relevant to their own research. Nonetheless, all of the chapters bring up good questions about authenticity, means, and, perhaps most interestingly, reception of and motivations for creating fake written artifacts. This is a welcome addition to the Studies in Manuscript Cultures series.

Roland Betancourt. *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020. 288 pp., 8 color, 50 black and white ill. \$35. ISBN: 9780691179452.

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**R**OLAND BETANCOURT’S *BYZANTINE INTERSECTIONALITY: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* is a must-read for everyone in