



## Boston University

College of Arts and Sciences

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The Boston University Program in Scripture in the Arts was proud to present a lecture series we called “Reading Between Word and Image in Medieval Europe, Africa, and Western Asia: Theory and Practice.” The series was intended to focus on the intersection and cultural mobility of textual objects and religious discourse, especially in early Islamic and Christian traditions. For a variety of reasons, some of the specific speakers we named in our initial proposal were not able to come, but with plenty of advance warning, we went back to the drawing board and were able to craft a fantastic program true to the original vision. Imagining an exploration of the interconnectedness of text and material object, we invited three scholars whose work educates the broad and varied ways in which the intersection of text with material objects directs, imposes, or elicits physically-accessed or embodied meaning. Our three-speaker program featured Marcus Milwright on the seventh-century Dome of the Rock mosaic inscriptions in Jerusalem; Caroline Walker Bynum on medieval German devotional objects related to veneration of the Holy Family; and Gary Vikan on the Christian art of Ethiopia. Each of our speakers offered workshops for graduate students and faculty in addition to their public lectures.

Our series began on Monday, October 9, 2015. The Program welcomed University of Victoria’s Marcus Milwright, who offered a lecture on the golden mosaic inscriptions circumscribing the inside and outside façade of ‘Abd Al Malik’s Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Closely examining these inscriptions in light of historical mosaic inlay techniques, architectural practices, the development of the Arabic script, and Quranic development, Professor Milwright compellingly framed novel ways of understanding the original purpose of the Dome of the Rock and its place in early Islam. The event, cosponsored not only by BUCH but also by the Department of the History of Art and Architecture and the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations, evoked a lively conversation about the early social and religious development of both the early Islamic state and Islam itself and drew a broad range of responses from audience members representing archaeology, art history, religious studies, linguistics, and other disciplines. The room, filled beyond projected capacity (120), also included representatives

from English, Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Romance Languages, and the School of Theology. Discussion was both animated and productive.

On Thursday, March 24, Caroline Walker Bynum from the Institute for Advanced Studies gave a lecture entitled “Holy Beds and Holy Families: Encounters with Devotional Objects in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.” This lecture in the Scripture and the Arts series also served as the Department of Religion’s Annual Lecture this year. Bynum’s talk explored the pregnant ambiguities that lie at the boundaries between worship, play, and ornamentation. Drawing primarily on objects found at the Metropolitan Museum, Bynum’s discussion highlighted rich layers of interactive sensuality—particularly sight and touch—that characterized late medieval Christian worship and which have since been lost or relegated to obscurity. The lecture was well attended by faculty, staff, and students of the university as well as members of the larger Boston community, whose attendance was particularly sought. Bynum’s faculty and graduate student workshop, entitled “Nuns and Their Statues in Late Medieval Wienhausen” (a case study on devotion and materiality) was attended to over-capacity and prompted animated discussion concerning the symbolism in late medieval Christian art. The attendees found the discussion of statuary headdress, particularly removable crowns, veils, and other symbolic dress to be particularly evocative, as it again brought to the fore modes of worship uncommon in contemporary times.

On Monday, April 4, 2016 we welcomed Dr. Gary Vikan, Benedict Visiting Professor of the History of Art at Carleton College. Dr. Vikan is an expert in Byzantine and Ethiopian Christian art, art and pilgrimage, and museum leadership. Dr. Vikan was director of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore for over 25 years, and oversaw the acquisition of their world class Ethiopian art collection. Before that, he held a major administrative role at Harvard’s Institute of Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC. Dr. Vikan’s visit was the first co-sponsorship between the African Studies Program and the Program in Scripture and the Arts. Both lecture and workshop were well attended by African Studies faculty and graduate students from a number of departments, and we were thrilled to welcome about twenty members of Boston’s Ethiopian community to the public lecture as well. He has been quite active in the international conversation around how to handle trade in antiquities, particularly since the rise of ISIS and concerns about the possibility that looting and the illegal sale of antiquities might support their military goals. We took advantage of Dr. Vikan’s expertise by having him offer a workshop on “The Legal and Moral Challenges of Acquiring Antiquities and Medieval Art: A Case Study,” which brought in participants from museum studies and other related programs in addition to colleagues in Religion, Literature, History of Art and Architecture, Political Science, and History. In sum, Vikan’s visit was especially gratifying in that it enabled us to reach a range of BU and Boston community members we have never drawn in before.

The Program in Scripture in the Arts is very grateful for the support of Boston University as we continue our work facilitating multidisciplinary conversations around sacred texts and the arts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deeana Klepper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping tail.

Deeana Klepper

Associate Professor of Religion and History

Faculty Coordinator, Program in Scripture and the Arts