

Book Reviews

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Bernard Meehan. *The Book of Kells: An Illustrated Introduction to the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin*, fully revised and updated edition. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2020. Paperback, 96p, \$19.95 (978-0-500-48024-3).

This is a beautiful book. It is fantastic for students and novices just learning about manuscripts, those learning codicological description, and anyone who wants an overview of the Book of Kells. The volume contains just a short taste of one of the most famous medieval manuscripts, and any of the sections could easily have been expanded further; indeed, I am rather impressed with how much information each section includes while still remaining concise. The information is also accessible to a wide variety of interests and knowledge levels and, in my honest opinion, is worth the price for the illustrations alone.

Dr. Bernard Meehan was Head of Research Collections and Keeper of Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin until his retirement from the position in 2016. He has written widely on insular manuscripts, including other works on the Book of Kells, as well as on the history and manuscripts of Scotland and northern England from the Norman Conquest to circa 1200 AD. There are few people I would trust to write an analysis of the Book of Kells as much as I trust Dr. Meehan.

The Book of Kells was produced circa 800 AD and is one of the best known and most easily identifiable medieval manuscripts in existence. In many ways, it embodies Irish creativity and national pride. Its imagery is sumptuous and vivid, combining both textual ornaments and expressive illustration. It is also a highly uneven manuscript with the hands of a number of scribes and artists with varying degrees of skill evident in different sections of the manuscript. Far from detracting, this

unevenness adds to its value as an artifact through which we can better understand insular manuscript production.

This volume is a short but thorough introduction and analysis of the Book of Kells. It is a fun book for manuscript scholars who are already familiar with medieval manuscript production, but I believe this volume shines for what it can provide to those just starting out in the field. Dr. Meehan writes concisely and clearly in a way that makes the information in this book available to people who might not be comfortable with a more academic writing style. More than that, Dr. Meehan describes and expands upon details and concepts in both manuscript production and art history in a way that will teach those unfamiliar with the concepts but not patronize those who do. When I think back to my early studies when I was just cracking into the basics of medieval manuscripts and their production, a study like this would have been invaluable. The general breakdown of the content could be used as a general outline for how to go about describing manuscripts and the more technical aspects that Dr. Meehan describes would be easy to research further.

There are 98 full-color illustrations, many of them full-page, which serve both as examples tied to descriptions in the text and to give a visual overview of the manuscript as a whole. The content is organized into four parts: Historical Background, Structure, Decoration, and Scribes and Artists.

The first section on the historical background of the manuscript discusses its creation, what we know about its provenance, an examination of the possible and probable provenance history where facts are unknown, and a history of the manuscript during its tenure at Trinity College. This section also provides a description of some of the codicological aspects of the manuscript, such as spelling, as well as an explanation about translations and page citation conventions used in the manuscript (for example, f. for folio) for those unfamiliar with manuscript description. The portion on provenance, both known and possible, is especially interesting for the rich history it conveys and the clear way Dr. Meehan describes what could have been a very confusing logical path.

The structure section discusses the contents of the manuscript (canon tables, the image of the Virgin and Child, list of Hebrew names, *Breves Causae* and *Argumenta*, and the four individual Gospels) as they appear in the manuscript. This portion also gets into details about the physical structure of the manuscript, including which leaves are lacking. The images included here are extremely helpful in illustrating the explanations in this section. There is also some discussion on the interplay of text and image, which is one of the topics in this volume that could easily be expanded and take up its own book.

The section on decoration discusses the style, symbols, and themes of the manuscript as a whole, including anecdotes and influences with other manuscripts. Themes and symbols highlighted are: the Cross, the Eucharist, the lozenge shape, angels, the Evangelists, animals, scenes from the Gospels, and textual allusions (for example, two lions representing both Christ and the devil). These symbols and themes are discussed in regard to how they specifically appear in the Book of Kells as well as their general appearance in manuscripts, which is again very useful for those who are not familiar with medieval manuscript illustration. One slight disappointment is that there is no thorough discussion on the decoration of insular manuscripts in general.

The final section on scribes and artists includes a description of the script, writing conventions used, and noncontemporary corrections to the text. The illustrations tied to the scribal hand descriptions are enormously helpful in understanding how the hands differ and I truly wish all paleographic descriptions used illustrations in this way. There is also a discussion of the artists and their various roles (goldsmith, portrait painter, and illustrator) and the materials and tools (vellum, pigments, inks) used to create the manuscript.

I cannot reiterate strongly enough how valuable I feel this book is for early scholars and for teaching manuscript studies. The general organization of the contents, the descriptions and explanations of concepts, and the sheer breadth of how much Dr. Meehan covers in a short volume all provide so much potential for learning and teaching. I can see this volume working well in a teaching collection as well as on a course syllabus, especially with its low price point. Teaching purposes aside, this is a fun volume for any collection.—Diana La Femina

Kathy Peiss. *Information Hunters: When Librarians, Soldiers, and Spies Banded Together in World War II Europe.* Oxford University Press, 2019. Ebook, 296p. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190944612.001.0001>)

Searching for vital intelligence behind enemy lines, inventing essential technology in the nick of time, and saving priceless relics from unknown and treacherous fates: librarians and other pioneers on the leading edge of information science take center stage in a global clash between democratic freedom and authoritarianism in *Information Hunters*. Eminent historian of American culture Kathy Peiss has provided a scholarly work to foreground the librarians, archivists, and intelligence officers sidelined during the recent popularity of the “Monuments Men,” showcasing the contributions of the men—and women—who helped save humanity’s written legacy and liberate information from its constraints. Beyond the individual stories, however, is the mixed, sometimes murky legacy of American collecting and how prestigious research libraries benefited from the fog of war.

Much of Peiss's scholarship has focused on the study of gender and sexuality in American culture. Her work has looked at issues of agency among women and minority groups in early modern America, including *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, published in 1982. Other full-length historical analyses have examined fashion and beauty standards, such as *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (1998). With *Information Hunters*, Peiss trains her critical gaze on the pivotal World War II period to discern the individuals and factors that influenced how information would be managed and shared in a radically reconfigured world. Forgoing gender analysis for the most part while following the interwoven threads of the nascent information revolution before, during, and after World War II, Peiss adds complexity to the previous institutional and biographical histories. Well-known men from the history of twentieth-century librarianship such as Archibald MacLeish and Frederick Kilgour move alongside lesser-known figures such as Library of Congress cataloger turned intelligence operative in occupied Paris, Maria Josepha Meyer.

From her prestigious position as the Roy F. and Jeannette P. Nichols Professor of American History at the University of Pennsylvania, Peiss followed a personal thread connecting her to one of the historical actors involved in this story to examine the confluence of evolving information science and librarianship with the birth of American intelligence operations. Deeply entwined is her appreciation for the "social lives and secret lives of books" (215), helping us understand how millions of textual objects—some invaluable evidence of cultures nearly eradicated—exchanged hands and added to their layers of history, some hidden forever.

As people and nations around the world confronted the rise of fascism and the specter of genocide played out through international conflict and horrific war, experts inside and outside of librarianship wrestled with how to manage, preserve, and operationalize rapidly expanding volumes of information. Through their coordination and collaboration with government intelligence services and allied military operations, librarians and other information professionals became valuable assets to help make "open source" information—treated by Peiss as the vast array of published and non-secret materials including serials, newspapers, and monographs that gained sudden importance as sources of strategic intelligence—more accessible and to reorder and process the textual collections looted and confiscated by armies on multiple fronts.

Information Hunters seeks in part to explain the emergence of American librarians and research centers as international leaders through the technological developments, wartime service, and collecting opportunities of World War II. "American librarians, soldiers, and spies came together in unique conditions in World War II, with its uprooting and destruction of culture, ideological warfare, and state-led

mobilization of knowledge" (14). Peiss asserts that the wartime missions "gave librarians a new confidence about the importance of research libraries and international collections" in supporting American global dominance politically and intellectually, while facilitating the greater dissemination of knowledge worldwide (14).

Peiss uses tightly packed writing to convey the results of meticulous scouring of archives and government records, weaving a dizzying array of characters and acronyms, some previously known and others newly centered in the grand narrative of World War II. She examines the uniquely appropriate skill sets and vital contribution of librarians and archivists while highlighting the intrigue and daring escapades of some of them working alongside spies in neutral places, such as Lisbon, and on or near the front lines in Poland, France, and ultimately Germany. With carefully constructed chronologies of bureaucratic and agency development befitting a social history, Peiss includes thefts and duplicitous subterfuges, ethical lapses and impossible choices to keep the excitement of wartime stories in place for readers not enthralled enough by the uncertain fates of looted manuscripts, cataloguing breakthroughs for indexing reams of journals and newspapers and pulp novels, or rapid advances in field imaging for microreproduction.

With the partnership of MacLeish, the charismatic leader of the Librarian of Congress during the war years who led its reorganization, and Wild Bill Donovan, the head of the newly formed Office of Strategic Service (OSS), Peiss illustrates the emerging paradigm of an information-centered world, as the Library of Congress modernized and the US embraced the need for a well-resourced and active intelligence apparatus. Libraries and librarians were present at the birth of modern American intelligence services. "From the first, Donovan had been influenced by MacLeish, who believed that librarians were uniquely qualified to organize, classify, and retrieve information from abroad" (19).

Peiss allows the evolution of information-gathering entities and military intelligence roles for the various cultural professionals, from journalists and booksellers to anthropologists, to convey the unfolding of the war and postwar conflict. Over the course of seven chapters, Peiss employs a largely chronological approach to move from prewar debates on the future of the book and professional librarianship through the urgent need to collect and analyze vast arrays of open source information and intelligence, acquire and manage tons of Nazi archives and the cultural legacy of fascism and propaganda, and the drive to save millions of looted, stolen, and damaged items. The intelligence efforts of librarians working for the Library of Congress and OSS transformed to include service in military units such as the T-Forces that confiscated or purchased massive amounts of material in the "wild scramble" toward the end of the war.

The detailed study treatment of the Interdepartmental Committee for the Acquisition of Foreign Publications (IDC) within the OSS and the early-career influences on Kilgour, who would later become the founding director of OCLC after a distinguished academic career, is valuable. Peiss uses the rapidly evolving work of the IDC and other agencies to highlight fascinating individuals including Adel Kibre (42). One of the few female field directors, Kibre had already established herself as a medievalist scholar and expert in microphotography before becoming one of IDC's most effective agents. IDC operatives like Kibre and the author's uncle, Reuben Peiss, hopped from neutral countries to occupied areas, competing against German and Japanese agents, gathering materials for microfilming and acquisition, dealing with booksellers and underground dealers, often with Nazi connections, devoting themselves to preservation of information and doing what they could to win the war (53). Through innovations such as the Subject Index Section of IDC, which began in August 1943, Kilgour and "the librarians of the IDC transformed the familiar forms of books and serials into the genre of intelligence" (61).

Peiss focuses on Europe and the collecting, imaging, indexing, and analysis work along the ever-shifting frontlines and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The book's brief glimpses into Africa, southern Asia, and the intersection of British imperial interests with the Allied war effort, and China and the role missionaries and other agents of westernization and colonialism across the world, point toward a fascinating gap one may wish Peiss engaged with more fully, particularly with later awareness of the rise of international studies and scholarly focus on non-Western cultures that research libraries would struggle to address in the decades to come.

Between astounding numerical analyses and dramatic photographs, readers are confronted with calamitous carnage enacted upon Jewish cultural heritage and the invaluable libraries of Europe. Librarians and archivists working within the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) division of the US Army struggled with millions of moldering scrolls and rare books, rescued from caves and bombed-out buildings across the continent, at the Rothschild Library and Offenbach Documents Archive in Frankfurt. As Allied forces crept closer to victory, the Library of Congress Mission sought to preserve European culture evidence of the fascist period, working in cooperation with American universities, while various groups, sometimes in competition, gathered documents for processing in massive document repositories.

Peiss includes in these efforts the aggressively unilateral approach of others, including the Hoover Institution at Stanford, the former President himself, and his agents (122–123). With cigarettes and cash, care packages and favors, collectors used whatever means necessary to acquire. One notorious postwar controversy to emerge

from dubious collecting practices was the publication of Goebbels's extensive diaries, although the combination of stories and vague recollections on how they were acquired never established a clear chain of custody. Some figures instrumental in the successful acquisition of invaluable materials also benefited financially through their connections, such as Max Loeb's sale of looted items through his bookshop in New York. Thinkers who helped the world make sense of the rise of fascism and genocide such as Hannah Arendt, through emerging organizations such as Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, advised on the fate of the remnants of cultural genocide, finalizing the work of MFAA and LCM. Ultimately hundreds of thousands of items of Judaica were distributed to American libraries, while many of the most important and precious were removed by scholars and complicit administrators before official channels could decide appropriate policies.

Peiss attempts to untangle the historical morass of how the Allies, from the West and the Soviet Union, dealt with the millions of volumes of Nazi propaganda, fascist-era popular literature, and usable scholarly and scientific publications. Small-town libraries and military officials alike had to navigate a shifting minefield of regulations for segregating, destroying, and censoring materials, while the American public back across the Atlantic had moments of horror in reaction to infamous "Order No. 4" and news of "book burning, American style." Approaches to keeping books varied greatly between the allied zones of occupation, as well as considerations for ensuring that learning and reading material were available while stamping out the Nazi influence.

With *Information Hunters*, Peiss weaves librarians and information science back into the complex, alternately tragic and heroic telling of the great battles of the first half of the twentieth century: between authoritarianism and personal liberty, racial nationalism and democratic multiculturalism, freedom of expression and centralized power and total war. Information was key to the technological advances and innovation that allowed the modern age to survive World War II and the Cold War. Although most returned to library jobs after the war, the information hunters and their technological innovations and dedication were key to victory, despite how tenuous the survival of manuscripts, books, and the freedoms that allow them to exist can still seem to be.—*Joshua C. Youngblood, University of Arkansas*

Michael Vinson. *Bluffing Texas Style: The Arsons, Forgeries, and High-Stakes Poker Careers of Rare Book Dealer Johnny Jenkins*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020. Paperback, 250p. \$21.95 (ISBN 978-0-8061-6542-4).

The story of Johnny Jenkins, rare book dealer, forger, gambler, and misterioso, has haunted me since my days in library school nearly a decade ago. I first encountered Jenkins through his publication *Rare Books and Manuscript Thefts: A Security System*

for Librarians, Booksellers, and Collectors, which was printed in 1982 while Jenkins served as president of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA). I was doing research related to the history of book theft in the United States and found Jenkins's short text (only 27 pages) to be a helpful insight into how the ABAA viewed book theft and security. Pursuing Jenkins a bit further, I quickly came upon Calvin Trillin's fascinating 1989 *New Yorker* article that chronicled Jenkins's demise. The details of Jenkins's secret life of forgeries, gambling, and arson were fascinating; the details of his death (shot in the back of the head, no weapon found, ruled a suicide?) were macabre and confounding. A few years later, while on break at a conference in Austin, TX, I walked into a used bookstore and found a copy of Jenkins's *Audubon and Other Capers* (1976), which told the tale of his exploits in helping the FBI track down book thieves in the early 1970s. The completely contradictory life that Jenkins led, coupled with his untimely and odd death, stuck in my brain in the form of unanswered questions, unclear details, and an unresolved murder or suicide. While it was not up to me to put the pieces together and offer a clear picture of Johnny Jenkins's life, career, and death, it had to be done by someone. That someone, it turns out, was another rare book dealer specializing in Texas and the West, Michael Vinson.

In Vinson's fast-paced, engrossing, and ultimately satisfying study of Johnny Jenkins, the mysteries and uncertainties that plagued me since graduate school (and have plagued others far longer) are resolved. Vinson delivers both a captivating narrative and an historically grounded character study, beginning with Jenkins's young days as a "born trader" raised by two devoted and highly encouraging parents. Jenkins began his trading career at an early age as a numismatist, reporting his local club's coin-collecting stories to the national journal, *Numismatist*, at age 14. Jenkins moved from coins to books when he became obsessed with Texas history and the history of the Confederacy in high school. This fascination culminated in the publication of his first book, *Recollections of Early Texas*, in 1958—on the day he graduated from high school at age 18.

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Vinson explores how these early connections and successes fed Jenkins's lust for fame and fortune, not only through academic publications but through the buying and trading of materials (first coins and then rare books). Through the success of his first book, Jenkins gained entrance into the world of rare books and archival material by working as a college freshman at the Texas State Archives in Austin. Almost immediately, Jenkins started working on ways to exploit this access to his own benefit. Vinson describes incidents of "archive work and deal making" that Jenkins participated in during his undergraduate days. These incidents later developed into thefts from various archives throughout the state that Vinson connects to Jenkins and his friend and business partner C. Dorman David.

Jenkins's firsthand experience in the archives, including seeing and participating in the behind-the-scenes deals that are made between private collectors and sellers and institutional purchasers, gave Johnny the knowledge and connections to go into business for himself. He was a friendly, well-liked, and affable fellow who could talk a seller down on their prices just as easily as he could talk a buyer up on theirs. He became quite adept at flipping material from one person or collector to another with a nice profit for himself at the end. His success, which Vinson details as being buoyed by thefts and forgeries from the mid-1960s onward, was on display in as public and visible a manner as possible. Jenkins loved to show off his success, whether in the form of the Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud he drove around in 1966 or proudly crowing about his company's more than half a million dollars in book sales in 1968. The reality, that the Rolls was continuously in need of repair or that the Jenkins Company had a silent partner that helped financially float its expansion, was never of concern. Jenkins was more concerned with his image and how he was perceived; the look of things mattered more than the reality. This aspect of Jenkins's personality is woven throughout Vinson's biographical study, influencing the rest of his life, and ultimately damns him in the end.

Vinson paints a picture of Johnny Jenkins as a man of excess. He would acquire items and try to sell them at a ridiculous profit, often improperly grading and misdescribing items to overvalue them. While some buyers would call Jenkins out for his blatant inaccuracies and demand a refund, there were more who did not question what they bought, and early on his profits far outweighed his refunds. In 1970, Jenkins applied for membership in the ABAA but was rejected because of his shady dealings and overgrading of materials. He was deeply hurt by this rejection, but soon got his revenge. In 1971, Jenkins was approached by noted mobster Kenneth Paull, who had possession of 100 plates from Audubon's *Birds of America* that had been stolen from Union College. Jenkins agreed to purchase the stolen plates, alerting the FBI to Paull's whereabouts and working with them on a sting operation. Paull was caught, the stolen items recovered, and Jenkins lauded as a hero. This led to him not only becoming

an ABAA member in 1972, but president of the organization from 1980 to 1982 and (ironically) the security officer of the organization and liaison to the FBI.

Even with acceptance into the fellowship of booksellers, Jenkins continued the behavior that had gotten him rejected in the first place. This included not only inaccurately describing items for sale but also the creation and sale of forgeries. Vinson describes in detail a series of incidents in which Jenkins “substituted forgeries and inferior copies to sophisticated collections and scholars just as readily as he did to a beginning collector...the risk of a daring and unethical impulse seemed to drive him more than anything else” (129). This is where the book is at its most fascinating and entertaining. The details of Jenkins’s trickery that Vinson has been able to uncover are hair-raising, eye-opening, and nearly unbelievable. I could not help but admire Jenkins for his creativity and sheer gumption.

At the heart of this book is Vinson’s research material: Jenkins’s own letters and personal papers, housed at Southern Methodist University. The details Vinson has pulled together through what is clearly a close scouring of the collection serve to bring not only concrete evidence but Jenkins’s personality to the forefront of the book. Vinson supplements these archival sources with personal stories, anecdotes, and testimonies from those who knew Jenkins best: his fellow poker players, Texas historians, and (most significantly) colleagues in the rare book industry. The raw and honest nature of these testimonies leads me to think that this book could only have been written by someone like Michael Vinson. His personal dealings with all of the booksellers, including Jenkins himself, leads to an air of authenticity and clarity that would have been difficult to achieve by an outside historian, journalist, or investigator. What Vinson is able to piece together comes not only from his fastidious research but from his personal experiences and reflections as well. This includes conversations with anonymous informants within the book trade that only someone like Vinson would have been able to obtain.

Together with Vinson’s approachable and captivating writing style, these testimonies and Jenkins’s own papers combine to deliver as complete and satisfying a narrative of Johnny Jenkins life as I have read to date. Vinson’s book answers the questions about Jenkins that have been left so long unanswered and provide closure on a life that he describes as dominated by “bluff, bluster, and self-deception” (183). For the reader, it is a thrilling tale told well and a story of both caution and concern. The book not only provides details about Jenkins and his exploits, it also offers valuable insights into the book trade that may not be widely known. For librarians, archivists, book historians, and rare book enthusiasts, Vinson’s swift-moving and rewarding portrayal is a glimpse into the dark underbelly of a world in which we all reside. And it proves that the tale of Johnny Jenkins is one that still haunts even after all this time.—*Brian Shetler, Drew University*