For the past two decades, teachers of medieval art surveys have had a choice of two widely distributed and respected textbooks. Marilyn Stokstad's *Medieval Art*, first published in 1986 by Harper & Row, the text I bought for $22.95 when I enrolled in my first medieval art survey almost twenty years ago, introduced a restricted series of classic monuments with a snappy and immediate text and tiny, murky, black and white photographs. Its brief and to-the-point discussions built a stylistic development across thirteen centuries of Western Christian art, framed within the greater sweep of medieval history. Stokstad's textbook was followed in 1989 by James Snyder's *Medieval Art. Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, 4th-14th century*, from Prentice-Hall. Larger, longer, better illustrated with both pictures and maps, this textbook strained the patience of students by being both too long and detailed, and too expensive, often retailing for as much as $85.00. Thus Stokstad's second edition arrives to the eager expectations of instructors in a field not overburdened with textbooks.

Like the previous edition, Marilyn Stokstad's revised *Medieval Art* concentrates on the Christian art of western Europe. Beginning with the Late Antique and running through the Gothic, Stokstad describes in chronological order the style and iconography of medieval artworks, interpreting them through the lens of their religious, and to a lesser extent political, environment. Rather than diving directly into the art of late antiquity as did the first edition, the second edition is introduced with a new chapter titled, aptly, "An Introduction to Medieval Art," that serves to situate the art of the Middle Ages in its Christian context. In the three-page opening section Stokstad uses the twelfth-century Stavelot triptych to explain some of the key concepts necessary to an understanding of medieval art: that it was most frequently anonymous, both in terms of artist and patron; that it commonly served a sacred function; and that it often depicted Christian subject matter or a specifically Christian interpretation of historical events. This introduction also highlights the connections between East and West and the relative importance of the so-called "minor arts." Descriptions of the foundational Christian story, the Bible, and important religious rituals have been moved from deep in chapter 1 to nearer the beginning. A discussion of pre- and post-Edict official Roman art has been consolidated into chapter 1, rather than being split between two chapters, as before.

Such changes are typical of how the book has been reworked. Generally speaking, the revised text follows the old text closely, and only cosmetic changes are in evidence. As in the first chapter, sections of text have been rearranged, renamed, and at times reworded. Chapter 4, previously titled "Barbarian Art," has been more sensitively renamed "Early Medieval Art in the West," and expanded to include a few more objects, including the ninth-century Oseberg ship. Newly added ubiquitous textbook boxes make the text as a whole easier for students to navigate. Often, these merely extract key concepts from the text of the first edition, while others introduce people, materials, techniques and iconography, although these are sometimes inexplicably many pages removed from the relevant monuments. In addition, Stokstad has made a concerted effort to broaden her coverage to include many groups neglected in the previous edition. The art and architecture of Europe's urban Jewish population and the contribution of women patrons and artists have been thoughtfully integrated into the new edition. A
large box near the beginning of the book highlights the story of Galla Placidia (33, oddly separated by five pages from the monuments she patronized), and Queens Theodelinda and Eleanor of Aquitaine play expanded roles. Artworks associated with women have not been segregated to the ends of chapters, but instead worked into the narrative of each chapter, with the exception of the misleading and extremely brief subcategory “Books for Women” (250-251), which covers the Scivias, the Hortus deliciarum and the Ingeborg Psalter, all of which, it could be argued, are books intended for an international aristocratic audience and better discussed among their Romanesque and Gothic brethren. Since the five examples of Romanesque manuscripts discussed in the first edition have been disappointingly cut and replaced by a single miniature from the Citeaux Lectoriany, however, the Scivias and Hortus deliciarum would not have much company. Even more striking is the addition of medieval Jewish art and architecture. At the beginning of the text, Stokstad has renamed the subsection “Christian Art Before Constantine” to “Jewish and Christian Art Before Constantine,” added a Jewish catacomb painting, and a survey of Late Antique Jewish synagogues and their interior decoration. At the end the synagogue reappears, in both Spain and the Czech Republic. One wishes, however, that at least one example of the many surviving Sephardic or Ashkenazi Mahzors or Haggadahs might have found their way into the discussion of Gothic miniatures.

In medieval art, Stokstad's preface explains that she sees Christianity as the thread that connects the artworks. Virtually no secular art or architecture can be found in the book. Furthermore, as she says “The great cultures of Eastern Europe, of the Orthodox Church, and of Islam have been given far less attention than they deserve” (xi). Stokstad washes her hands of explaining the vast multiplicity of arts and dynasties of Islam, claiming “this history deserves a special study.” While this is indeed true, the superficial coverage found on pages 143-148 gives students the false impression that Islamic art was uniform over time and place, and that Muslim motifs are universal.

All the same, the text is concise and informative, and introduces the classic series of useful core monuments with a few new additions, upon which an instructor can expand in class. The author has been done a disservice, however, by the publisher, which joined her text to photographs so poor that the usefulness of the book as a teaching tool is seriously diminished. Given the vast improvements made in the last twenty years in photographic printing and the kinds of photographs found in comparable textbooks, this book should be well illustrated. While many of the color photographs in the second edition are beautifully reproduced others have an odd tonality. See, for example, the blurry Cubiculum of the Velled Lady (2.5) and De Clairs (sic) Mulieribus (12.16), the glowing pink of Hagia Sophia's exterior and environs (3.1) and the Codex Aureus (5.22) or the grayish Last Judgment by William de Brailes (fig. 10. 36). The exterior of Notre Dame (9.22) is badly pixilated. The black and white photographs are washed out at best, and frequently laughably bad. At least half the illustrations seem to be the same black and white prints used almost twenty years ago in the first edition. The original scratched, muddy, black and white photo of Hagia Sophia's domed interior (3.7) has been rescreened and made even less intelligible. The Scribe Ezra from the Codex Amiatinus (4.28) and Emeterius and Senior in the Tábara Apocalypse (7.5) have met the same fate. The cloister of Santo Domingo in Silos (8.15), the tympanum at Vezelay (8.30) and the interiors of Fontenay (8.37), Poitiers (9.24) and Chartres (10.3) have been bleached to a uniform grey.

Furthermore, one could call the number of maps in the book chintzy. There are three, two unlabeled and virtually identical maps at the beginning of the book, and one small map a third of the way through the text. Most twenty-first century undergraduates have an extremely slim grasp of geography, yet the introduction to Late Antique and Early Christian art includes no map of the Roman world. While the art of the Byzantine world is introduced in chapter 6, one encounters a map that includes the Byzantine Empire only in chapter 7, "Art at the Millennium." There are no maps at all in the Romanesque and Gothic sections, and thus although the traditional discussion of the four pilgrimage roads and the Roncesvalles pass in the Pyrenees remains (204), nowhere are these identified on a map. The home of the Gothic style is, as usual, located in the Île de France (240), which is also not indicated on any of the maps. The glossary is extensive and useful, as is the redesigned timeline, which contrasts in two columns artworks with people and events.

Stokstad described her original project “to summarize and define the styles found in over a thousand years of art and architecture” (xii), and at that she has certainly succeeded. Critiquing a textbook is a more complex task than simply assessing how well the author has achieved the goals she has set for herself. The author of a textbook is writing a service book. In the ever-more-fraught economics of textbook publishing, and especially in producing what may be one of only two or three medieval art survey textbooks published in the next several decades (to judge by the fruits of the last several), the author of such a textbook has a responsibility to serve as broad a clientele as possible. Marilyn Stokstad’s Medieval Art may soon be one of the only single-volume texts available to those teaching a semester-long survey of medieval art. Thus, we may ask: is this sort of textbook useful and relevant to the goals of the instructors and students in a medieval art class?

Current scholarship on teaching divides approaches to instruction into three main philosophical camps.[[1]] Teachers of medieval art history may believe that their primary responsibility in the classroom is to impart an important body of material, and thus to enrich the knowledge base of their students. This is known as the “information model.” Other teachers may feel that their most important task is to instill in the students the desire, and the skills, to learn the material themselves, termed the “motivation model.” Most of us, of course, take a middle road, known as the "dual process model." We would like our students to finish the course having gained both a set body of knowledge, and the ability to understand it and increase it using the skills of critical thinking and visual analysis that have been cultivated in the classroom and, in an ideal world, by the textbook.

In order to do this, however, the students must have the opportunity to practice the skills that professional art historians use when they conduct their own research. The wealth of visual and text resources now available to computer-savvy students and instructors can create the illusion that textbooks are no longer necessary when teaching a course above the introductory level.
Primary texts suited to teaching are available on sites like labyrinth.georgetown.edu, or the Internet Medieval Sourcebook, and other sites of interest can be reached through gateways such as Netserf.org, and the-orb.net. Some universities subscribe to image providers such as the Art Museum Image Consortium (Amico) or Artstor, while others have the institutional support necessary to digitize their own image collections.

Several challenges stymie those who would attempt to construct their own sets of course resources in place of the traditional medieval art textbook, however. First, neither Amico nor Artstor at this time provide enough images for an instructor to construct a course database using those resources alone. By one estimate, Artstor provides a scant third of the imagery necessary to a course on medieval art. Thus while instructors lucky enough to have a dedicated institutional database at their disposal, and the leisure to create an image portfolio from scratch, could perhaps dispense with a textbook as picture reference, most college teachers will still need to rely on a set of published illustrations for the foreseeable future. Second, students with little more than a one year survey of the whole of western art under their belts are seldom ready to strike out on their own, stitching together an understanding of medieval art and architecture using nothing but diverse primary sources, rosters of images and the encouragement and guidance of an enthusiastic instructor. For those of us who desire that students finish the course with a breadth of both skills AND knowledge of medieval art, this extreme version of "problem-centered learning" would yield a fairly questionable harvest. A textbook, for the time being, remains an essential component of a medieval art survey.

Traditional textbooks in most disciplines, among which we must include Stokstad's *Medieval Art*, have taken "a level of importance and assumed an authority similar to that exercised by devotional texts in the course of religious observance," to borrow a characterization of textbook use from another discipline. Because most upper level course instructors expect students to arrive in their classes with a certain body of knowledge gained in prerequisites, both instructors and students in lower level classes demand that a textbook contain this unquestioned canon of material. Nothing highlighted my students' misperception of the role of the textbook as much as when, for an entire term, one of my students handed me at the beginning of every class a list of the 'mistakes' I had made in the previous lecture, based on instances in which the information I had presented differed from that in the textbook. As often as I explain that textbooks are works of interpretation written by a knowledgeable authority, the textbook itself argues that it is the gospel truth, based on its tone. Sam Wineburg has identified three methods used by textbook writers to convey finite authority in their texts. First, textbook writers, unlike scholarly writers, tend to avoid "metadiscourse," or "places in the text where the author intrudes to suggest judgment, emphasis or uncertainty." Second, the steps by which scholars arrived at an understanding of an event or monument are not described. Third, there is no visible author of the text, which is written entirely in the "omniscient third person." In fact, because textbooks seldom present the "tools of the trade," including the scholar, the scholar's process and preexisting assumptions, and his or her materials, students are not taught to question either the materials or the scholars who interpreted them and to arrive at their own answers. In other words, a traditional textbook may teach a student a bald set of facts, but it does not teach the student to analyze and learn.

Art history, like its sister disciplines history, philosophy, literature, sociology and anthropology, falls under the heading of what are called "Competing-Systems Disciplines." Unlike in mathematics or the sciences, where the information presented in introductory textbooks is the subject of virtually universal agreement, and for that matter has to be understood in its entirety before students can progress to a higher level of study, in a competing-systems discipline experts routinely disagree about what they see and why it appears the way it does. And yet art history textbooks have traditionally presented a series of "masterpieces" accompanied by a body of interpretive information, as if this information had been scientifically proven, leaving students with no impression of the wealth of scholarly debate that surrounds the most interesting artworks. The skills used by art historians to untangle the meanings and importance of artworks and arrive at a multiplicity of interpretations are the very skills that students could learn to apply inside and outside the classroom, if they were cultivated in the right way.

Recently, a group of new, small size textbooks that treat a portion of the Middle Ages, often in a thematic or conceptual manner, have arrived on the scene. These books model the type of textbook that might also be useful for a lower level medieval art survey. The "Perspectives" series, from Prentice Hall and Harry N. Abrams, includes Thomas F. Mathews, *Byzantium from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1998), Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (1995), and Michael Camille, *Gothic Art, Glorious Visions* (1996). The authors treat their subjects thematically, with lively and well-illustrated texts replete with wordy captions, plentiful maps, timelines, and glossaries. Featuring examples of more as well as less famous objects, they delve into the social, political and religious contexts of the artworks. Like the "Perspectives" series, The Oxford History of Art series is well illustrated with a wealth of high-quality color photographs with lengthy descriptive captions, and includes maps and timelines, though no glossaries. This series is also more extensive. The art and architecture of the Middle Ages are covered by five books: Lawrence Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (2002), Roger Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture* (1999), Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (2000), Veronica Sekules, *Medieval Art* (2001) for western European art c. 1000-1500, and Nicola Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture* (2002) for western European architecture, c. 1140-1550. The Phaidon "Art & Ideas" series apparently aims to provide full coverage, but so far only John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (1997) has appeared.

These discrete studies feature an identifiable narrator whose opinions are often made overt. Their authors have attempted to incorporate "metadiscourse," historiography and scholarly debate into their texts. In Camille's *Gothic Art, Glorious Visions*, the author advertises his approach in the introduction, saying "This book takes a different approach, arguing that Gothic art is best understood, not through the abstract eye of the engineer or the text-bound gaze of the iconographer, but rather through..."
Looking at Gothic art as the embodiment of medieval visual experience is, of course, only one way of presenting a coherent view of more than three hundred years of image-making and viewing. The entire book is as personal. Lowden's discussion in *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* of the origins of Christian imagery is typical of his pedagogical approach in that it introduces several sides of the still lively debate on the subject, before arguing in favor (not surprisingly) of, in this case, the originality of early medieval artists. Unfortunately, these new series cannot be used to replace a single-volume survey textbook for a lower level class. Prentice-Hall's "Perspectives" series and Phaidon's "Art and Ideas" series do not cover the whole of the Middle Ages. At $17.95 to $18.95 per book, requiring all five Oxford History of Art books for a single course is likely to raise the ire of students enrolled in the class, not to mention the difficulty of getting them to read them all. One waits for a press to accept the challenge of providing a comparable textbook appropriate to a lower level medieval art survey.

NOTES:


[8] Lowden, pp. 55-60.
32 Medieval History Memes To Make You Laugh. Medieval Reactions That Describe Your Life. Prankster Trolls People At A Modern Art Exhibit. 29 Masterpieces Ruined By The Internet. Artistic Masterpieces That Were Ruined By The Internet. 20 Pics and Memes to Make Your Day Go Faster. 20 Hilarious Examples from Meme History. A lively platform for conversation and ideas about teaching and learning Art History. All are welcome at... See more of Art History by Stokstad & Cothren on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Art History by Stokstad & Cothren on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? Medieval Art book. Read 4 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. This beautifully produced survey of over a thousand years of Western ar... Marilyn Stokstad also teaches her reader how to look at medieval art—which aspects of architecture, sculpture, or painting are important and for what reasons. Stylistic and iconographic issues and themes are thoroughly addressed with attention paid to aesthetic and social contexts. Significantly updated, this second edition of Medieval Art spans the period from the second to the fifteenth centuries and includes over 4000 illustrations, over 100 in color, detailed maps, a time-line, glossary, bibliography, and index—all in a larger 8 by 10 inch trim size. ...more. Get A Copy. Kindle Store.