

Institution: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
Unit of Assessment: D31 - Classics
Title of case study: Making Byzantine Iconoclasm Matter
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The three key areas of impact are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Changes in the approaches of museum professionals at Tate Britain and the Birmingham Museums Trust; 2. Changes in 'popular' understanding of Byzantine icons, as reflected in museum pamphlets aimed at the general public rather than at a scholarly audience; 3. Changes in the Italian university system history curriculum. <p>Impact 1 is significant because it has directly and demonstrably affected the ways that two groups of museum professionals deal with their interface with the public. Impact 2 is significant because icons are perhaps the most important – and certainly the best known to a broad public – manifestation of Byzantine culture; changes in the way that they are presented to museum audiences and other readers of museum pamphlets have a direct impact on public understanding of Byzantine art and culture. Impact 3 is significant because it affects how Byzantine history and art history will be understood and taught to the next generation of Italian university students (Italy has the highest proportion of students at secondary school and university level taking modules in Byzantine studies of any country in Europe).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>During the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the late 1980s, Byzantine art became a major drawing card for the museum-going public. The most expensive exhibition ever mounted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was its 1997 'The Glory of Byzantium', which cost over \$3m, and there have been major 'blockbuster' exhibitions in Baltimore (1988), Brussels (1982), London (1994, 2008), New York (1975, 1997, 2004, 2012) and Paris (1994). In all cases, the medium fronted above all others was the icon, presumably because icons capture the public imagination and 'Byzantium has traditionally been considered a culture of icons' (Pentcheva 2006, <i>Icons and power</i>: 1). How the icon is understood in the modern world is thus a kind of microcosm for how Byzantine art is received. Brubaker's research on the Byzantine icon, its development, the reactions against its power (iconoclasm) and its subsequent triumph has thus found broader resonance than one might expect in the museum world.</p> <p>The research underpinning this impact case study has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Changed the way Byzantine icons are presented to the museum-going public; and 2. Generated a research network that has changed the way the museum professionals involved approach their research agendas; and 3. Anchored the 2013 blockbuster exhibition at Tate Britain, <i>Art under Attack</i>; and 4. Changed the history curriculum in the Italian university system. <p>Until 1997, the 'classic' articles, and all museum catalogues and handbooks devoted to Byzantine culture asserted that the rise in icon veneration was a seamless organic development that began in the fourth century, and reached a climax in the sixth. This assumption was demolished in a seminal article published in 1997, where Brubaker established that icons acquired power, and became important vehicles capable of conveying prayers to God, only toward the end of the seventh century (<i>ca</i> 680). She also showed that this represented a dramatic shift in the role of representation in the medieval Byzantine world. This is particularly significant because icons are representative of a broad Byzantine 'thought world' much larger than that encoded in texts, which most Byzantines could not read (and never heard read out loud) and which were predominantly written by urban elite male authors.</p> <p>Since then (particularly in two books co-authored with the Byzantine historian John Haldon, now at Princeton, outputs R1 and R2 below), she has established that the 680 shift was prompted by</p>

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anxiety caused by the Islamic conquests of the earlier seventh century; and that this new power of icons led directly to a reaction against the veneration of sacred portraits, Iconoclasm. Belief that icons carried the real presence of the person represented was ultimately accepted in 843 and remains a key tenet of Orthodox Greek Christianity.

Brubaker began the research in 1991, when she was teaching in the American University system (she took a position at the University of Birmingham in September 1994), funded by a J Paul Getty Senior Fellowship (1991/2) which allowed her to come to Birmingham to work with the Byzantine historian with whom she wrote the two subsequent books on Byzantine Iconoclasm, John Haldon. On the basis of this work she was asked by Harvard University to lead a colloquium on Iconoclasms in 2009, which led to the formation of the Iconoclasms Network, funded by an AHRC networking grant, which takes the material beyond Byzantium, from the broken swords of pre-historical bog burials to contemporary 'defacements' of Goya prints by the Chapman brothers to the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan buddhas, and embraces museum professionals as well as academic scholars.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

References to the research:

Submitted as outputs in RAE/REF 2001, 2008 or 2014:

- R1) Brubaker and Haldon 2011, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era, c. 680-850: a history* (Cambridge University Press) **[listed on REF2]**
- R2) Brubaker and Haldon 2001, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast era (ca 680-850): the sources* (Ashgate) **[available from HEI on request]**
- R3) Brubaker 1998, 'Icons before Iconoclasm?', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 45, 1215-54 **[available from HEI on request]**

Other relevant publications (all peer-reviewed):

- R4) Brubaker 2012: *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Bristol Classical Press/Bloomsbury). **[available from HEI on request]**
- R5) Brubaker 2009: 'Representation c. 800: Arab, Byzantine, Carolingian', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 6, 19, 37-55. **[available from HEI on request]**
- R6) Brubaker 2003: 'On the margins of Byzantine iconoclasm', in P Odorico, ed., *Byzantina-metabyzantina, La périphérie dans le temps et l'espace*, Actes de la 6e séance plénière du XXe Congrès international des Études byzantines, Dossiers byzantins 2 (Paris), 107-17. **[available from HEI on request]**

Grants & Fellowships:

- PI L Brubaker; Iconoclasms; AHRC networking grant; 09.2011-09.2013; £45k
- J Paul Getty Senior Fellowship; 08.1991-08.1992; full salary & benefits covered.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of Brubaker's expertise on Byzantine icons and iconoclasm is evident from the content of trade publications directed at the museum-going public (4D below), the translation of her 2012 book into Italian to serve as a set text in the medieval history curriculum at five Italian universities (details in E below), and her impact on museums and the practice of museum professionals, in particular the 2006 invitation to sit on the advisory board for the 2008 exhibition 'Byzantium' at the Royal Academy; the 2009 invitation from Harvard to organise a colloquium on Iconoclasms; and, most importantly in this context, from her invitation to a series of consultative meetings at Tate Britain in 2010 to discuss its exhibition on Iconoclasm, *Art under Attack* (opened 30.09.13). This, in turn, led to Tate's inclusion as a participating institution (along with the University of Notre Dame in Indiana USA) in the AHRC Networking application, and to Brubaker's inclusion in the full panoply of educational events associated with the exhibition – both those aimed at schoolchildren and those aimed at the adult general public – sponsored by Tate (impact occurring after July 2013).

A. From academic publications to the Iconoclasms Network

Byzantium is key to any discussion of iconoclasm because the word 'iconoclasm' was coined to describe the debates about the validity of religious portraiture that defined eighth- and ninth-century Byzantium. Brubaker's expertise on Byzantine icons and iconoclasm underpinned her role

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as PI for the AHRC award that funded the Iconoclasm Network. She led all Network discussions, and all 16 members of the Network read and discussed the short version of Brubaker and Haldon 2011 (R4 above) or her chapter on 'Icons and Iconomachy' in the Blackwells *Companion to Byzantium*; her expertise thus formed a core component of subsequent discussion – the 'backbone' of the Network.

B. Impact on exhibition

Following Brubaker's initial consultative meetings at Tate Britain, the first meeting of the Network, hosted by Tate Britain in September 2011, brainstormed and drew up a wish-list of objects to be included in the exhibition; the second meeting (hosted by Notre Dame in America in September 2012) discussed the 'hang' (how the pictures and objects were to be arranged in the gallery spaces) and all participants critiqued the near final drafts of each other's chapters in the 'popular' book that accompanied the exhibition, *Striking Images*, which was entirely written by Network members and appeared in time for the third Network meeting, held at Tate Britain in September 2013. The book launch for *Striking Images*, introduced by the Director of Tate Britain (Dr Penelope Curtis), occurred at Tate Britain on the night the exhibition opened, with full press coverage. The final chapter, written by the two curators of the exhibition and specifically about the exhibition itself, demonstrates the importance of the Network meetings to the exhibition: 'The [Iconoclasm] Networks constituted the first strategy for a comparative, cross disciplinary and cross sector study of "iconoclasm" The [Iconoclasm Network's] workshops conceptually anchored the development of the exhibition *Art under Attack*, and provided a range of theoretical models that shaped the curatorial approach to British iconoclasm' (see source 1 below). As another member of the Network wrote after viewing the exhibition: 'the main thing that struck me was how much the show is a show-and-tell version of [the Network's] new approach to iconoclasm.'

C. Impact on museum professional practice

The Iconoclasm Network has 16 members, 10 from the UK/EU and 6 from North America; 9 are established scholars; 3 are postgraduate researchers; 4 are museum professionals from Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Birmingham Museums Trust, and The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. In addition to direct impact on the exhibition *Art under Attack* at Tate Britain, the Network had lasting impact on museum practice. As described by one of the museum professionals: 'My participation in the [Iconoclasm] Network has made a significant contribution to my own professional development. As a museum and conservation professional, the experience has encouraged me to consider the research agenda for my organisation, its aims and how it is structured... I am presently working to establish a research group made up of staff from across the museum to test how we develop and deliver research and this is a direct result of my participation in the Iconoclasm Network'. He later wrote: 'My experience with the group has changed the way I look at the world. While I may have been aware of this lens of iconoclasm on the periphery of my vision when I joined the group [the Network has] helped to open up my aperture to this view of the world. I have always been struck by the power afforded the curator or creator in filling the public space of the gallery. It is an opportunity that is easily wasted and frittered away with big statements and little substance which is an obvious trap when dealing with this subject. [*Art under Attack* has] avoided the bear trap and grasped the opportunity to create something that is challenging, original and engaging which by my count is three out of three' (source 2).

D. Impact on museum publications aimed at the general public

The British Museum 'popular' book *Icons* 2007 (aimed at the general public rather than specialists – source 3) omits the hitherto blanket assertion that icons were windows to the holy from the beginning, and instead adopts the new interpretation developed in Brubaker (Brubaker 1989; R1 and R2) that this was part of a historical process that peaked in the late seventh century. There are no footnotes in this booklet, but the recommended reading (p. 138) omits the hitherto classic article espousing the 'old' interpretation (E Kitzinger 1954: 'The cult of images in the age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8, 85-150) and instead lists Brubaker and Haldon 2001 (R2).

E. Impact on the history curriculum in Italian HEIs

Brubaker 2012 (R4) – the short version of Brubaker and Haldon 2011 – was translated into Italian

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by Viella, a press specialising in history publications. Cecilia Palombelli, director of the press, explained: 'We are translating Professor Brubaker's *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* due to requests for an introductory book about Byzantine iconoclasm by colleagues at five universities to use as a set text for their medieval history courses.... We expect that other universities will also pick this up, and our experience is that there is a wide public interest in Italy for books of this kind. Professor Brubaker is of course well known to all Byzantinists in Italy, and they are anxious to have her research available for their students' (source 4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Extract from *Striking Images* (Ashgate 2013), available from HEI on request.
- [2] Factual statement provided by Acting Director, Birmingham Museums Trust.
- [3] *Icons* (The British Museum, 2007), available from HEI on request.
- [4] Factual statement provided by director of Viella, the Italian publishers responsible for the Italian translation of Brubaker 2012 (an English translation appears above).