

Kenyon College

Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture

Volume 7 | Issue 3

212-226

5-1-2021

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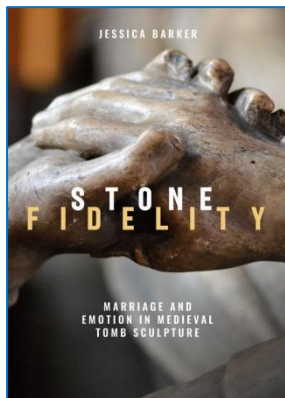
Recommended Citation

Badham, Sally. "Book Review: Jessica Barker, *Stone Fidelity. Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture*." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 7, 3 (2021): 212-226.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol7/iss3/7>

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PEREGRINATIONS

JOURNAL OF MEDIEVAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE
VOLUME VII, NUMBER 3 (SPRING 2021)



Review Jessica Barker, *Stone Fidelity. Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2020), xvi + 336 pp., 95 images, bibliography and index; £50 (hardback); ISBN 978-1-78327-271-6.

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Jessica Barker's important debut monograph focuses on medieval tomb monuments to couples. Many prior studies of the subject have concentrated on the religious imperatives driving tomb design, notably the doctrine of Purgatory and the related desire to attract the prayers of onlookers in order to speed the passage of the soul through Purgatory. Such issues receive scant attention here, with an emphasis instead on secular considerations. Barker's viewpoint is signalled in her book's subtitle 'marriage and emotion'. It may seem that trying to establish emotion as a driver of monumental design many centuries after the monuments' creation is like 'seeing through a glass darkly.' Yet her approach feeds into a well-established academic debate, initially sparked in England by Peter Laslett's 1965 *The World We Have Lost*, a pioneering albeit ultimately controversial work in quantitative sociological history.¹ His study of family and class, kinship and community in England between the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution argued *inter alia*, by studying records of marriage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that very early marriage was not, as is sometimes thought, a usual custom. Later and

¹ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965).

undoubtedly especially germane to Barker's approach, the history of emotions was pioneered by Peter and Carol Stearnes in 1985.²

As well as an introduction and epilogue, the book has four chapters: 'The double tomb: marriage, symbol and society'; 'Love's rhetorical power: the royal tomb'; 'Gender, agency and the much-married woman; and 'Holding hands: gesture, sign and sacrament'. This attractively produced and well-illustrated volume is thoroughly researched, as evidenced by the extensive bibliography. The index provides references for people and places, but I found the lack of a subject index a frustration when trying to locate specific topics. The text is written in a clear, jargon-free, and accessible style, which greatly helps in engaging and holding the attention of readers.

Barker takes as her starting point 'why did spousal love become such a popular theme across Western Europe in the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century?', a proposition which is open to debate, but which focuses on her central theme of representations of marital love. The book opens with a quotation from Philip Larkin's 1964 poem 'An Arundel Tomb', which begins with Larkin chancing upon a medieval tomb in Chichester Cathedral, perhaps memorialising Richard Fitzalan, earl of Arundel (d. 1376) and his wife, Eleanor of Lancaster (d. 1372), apparently holding hands. **(Fig. 1)** Larkin concentrates on his own reactions on viewing it, concluding 'Time has transfigured them into Untruth ... What will survive of us is love'. This is effective in grabbing the attention of readers at the outset and enticing them into the book; it continues to be used, perhaps over-used, as a *leitmotif* throughout the remainder of the text. There are some related concerns, however. First, Larkin's sentiments reveal nothing about the emotions and motivations of the person who commissioned the tomb monument, although as Barker explains that his words warn against viewing the significance of the pose

² Peter N. Stearnes with Carol Z. Stearnes, 'Emotionality: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 813-36.



Figure 1 Tomb, Chichester Cathedral, perhaps memorialising Richard Fitzalan, earl of Arundel (d. 1376) and his wife, Eleanor of Lancaster (d. 1372). Photo: © B. & M. Gittos

within our own time and culture. Second, although the Arundel tomb is a well-known example of a hand-holding monument, as she notes later, it has undergone substantial recutting and restoration, specifically the hands and much of the male's right arm, which are clumsily treated, including work by Edward Richardson (active 1829-1866), now notorious for his 'imaginative' restorations, e.g. of the effigies in Temple Church, London. Before the two figures were separated, thus there is no

Figure 2 Semi-effigial slab to Sir William de Bayous (d. c. 1327) and his wife, Careby (Lincolnshire). Photo: © C.B. Newham.



certainty that they belonged together, especially as the lady is of lesser quality than the military figure. Nonetheless, if they do indeed belong together it is difficult to imagine what the respective positions of their arms could have been if not hand holding.

In examining the emergence of the double tomb generally in Chapter 1, Barker regards its first appearance in England as occurring at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in contrast with continental exemplars including one in the Netherlands at the parish church in Holwierde (Groningen). This is a tapered coffin-lid of c.1150-1225 to an unknown couple embracing, and two angels lifting a soul to heaven in the upper section. Another early instance is the high tomb of c. 1235-40 in Brunswick Cathedral (Germany) to Duke Henry the Lion (d. 1195) and his wife Matilda Plantagenet (d. 1189).

Another apparent key word used in Barker's title is 'stone', but the work addresses, as well as relief effigies and other monumental types carved in stone, engraved brasses and relief cast copper-alloy effigies. Without them this study would have been much less complete. She concentrates much attention on royal and noble tombs because they are best documented; many are the subject of fascinating case studies in Chapters 2 and 3. Brasses also receive good coverage. Minor monumental types are, however, dealt with only cursorily. Many English cross slabs date from well before the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Her treatment of these monuments gives the impression that they are a peculiarity of the north of England and that all are endowed with appropriate symbols of gender and occupation, which is far from the case. Moreover, her highlighting of the double slab of c.1335-40, formerly inlaid with brass, at Dorchester (Oxfordshire) as a key part of a movement from symbolic to figural representation overlooks many earlier examples, albeit not double tombs. These include a bas-relief slab of c.1080-1130 from St. Frideswide's Priory, Oxford, now in the city museum, which features stylised crosses formed by concentric circles with a rudimentary face at the top.

Figure 3 Relief monument of c. 1340 to Sir John and Marjorie de Heslerton, Lowthorpe (Yorkshire, East Riding). Photo: © C.B. Newham.



Additional early examples combining cross and effigial imagery are at Gainford (Co. Durham), Sollars Hope (Herefordshire) and Curry Rivel (Somerset).

Chapter 1 examines later incised slabs, but Barker repeats Frank Greenhill's overly early dating of many foreign incised slabs, 'the majority dating to the second quarter of the fourteenth century', despite different conclusions in an authoritative study by Paul Cockerham which she cites.³ She also fails to refer to many other types of minor monuments, omitting double headstones and semi-effigials, e.g. the well-known double effigies covered by funeral palls at Stoke Rochford and Careby (Lincolnshire) (**Fig. 2**).⁴ Although the idiosyncratic double tomb at Lowthorpe (Yorkshire, East Riding) to Sir John and Marjorie de Heselton is mentioned, I was disappointed that she does so fleetingly, despite having previously published on it. Recent work draws attention to the tender way in which the couple's heads are inclined towards each other and the symbolism of the monument in presenting the fruits of their union at the terminals of a secular genealogical family tree over them makes the monument central to the theme of spousal love (**Fig. 3**).⁵

The core of Barker's study is Chapter 4 on hand-holding effigies dated before 1500, previously studied in detail only by Oliver Harris.⁶ It is supported by a pan-European gazetteer of examples limited to strictly hand-holding monuments, although the text additionally addresses 'gestural monuments'. This is helpful as it enables the inclusion of analogous double monuments, including an early example at Inchmahome (Scotland), showing the couple cuddling. Such specimens shed further important light on the hand-joining posture. Sadly, the list is not complete,

³ Paul Cockerham, 'Incised Slab Compositions in the Fourteenth Century' and 'Catalogue of Effigial Incised Slabs' in Sally Badham and Paul Cockerham (eds), *The Beste and fairest of al Lincolnshire' The church of St Botolph's, Boston, Lincolnshire, and its Medieval Monuments*, Oxford, 2012), 74-98 and 198-221.

⁴ Sally Badham, 'The Iconography and Meaning of Semi-Effigial and Related Monuments in Lincolnshire c1275-c1400' in *The Monuments Man: Essays in Honour of Jerome Bertram, F.S.A.*, ed. Christian Steer (Donington, 2020), 112-49, esp. 134-39.

⁵ Brian & Moira Gittos, *Interpreting Medieval Effigies. The Evidence from Yorkshire to 1400* (Oxford, 2019), case study 187-89.

⁶ Oliver Harris, "'Une tresriche sepulture": The Tomb and Chantry of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in Old St Paul's Cathedral, London', *Church Monuments*, 25 (2020), 7-35

even for true hand-joining monuments. Surprisingly, two English examples carved in alabaster are omitted. One at Broughton (Lincolnshire) is to Sir Henry Redford (d. 1404) and his wife, although the joined hands are missing. (**Fig. 4**) The second at Warrington (Lancashire) memorialises Sir John Boteler (d. 1463) and his wife, Margaret Stanley (d. c. 1492); although not listed, curiously it does feature in her map of examples. Although not strictly hand-holding, a brass at Brown Candover (Hampshire) to a civilian and his wife would have merited discussion; it is a unique in showing them with their arms interlinked (**Fig. 5**).

Outside England only five examples are included, yet despite my limited expertise concerning continental monuments, I can add more examples that deserved listing, mainly 'gestural monuments'. The earliest is that referred to earlier in Holwierde dated c. 1150-1225. Two more are in Ireland: a thirteenth-century freestone relief slab to William and Margaret Gour at St Mary's, Kilkenny (Co. Kilkenny) of c. 1350-1400 and another at Hospital (Limerick). In Spain there is a one example, formerly at Santa Perpetua de Gaia, now in the cathedral museum in Tarragona: it is a relief slab of c. 1320-30 to a knight of the Montagut family with his arm round the neck of a lady of the ca'Terra family. In Germany, at Schesslitz (Bavaria), a monument shows Friedrich von Truhendingen with his arm around his wife's shoulder.

Barker asserts that the Inchmahome example is the earliest surviving monument in Britain to depict the effigies of a married couple lying side by side, but this is to overlook the claims of the coffin lid at Winterbourne Bassett, (Wiltshire) showing the hand-joining pose, which does not belong to the later recess in which it is now placed (**Fig. 6**). In the gazetteer she re-dates it to c. 1310-30 although giving no reasons. This is some 20-40 years later than the date assigned to it by all other authorities, including in the two studies by Harry Tummers and Nigel Saul she cites

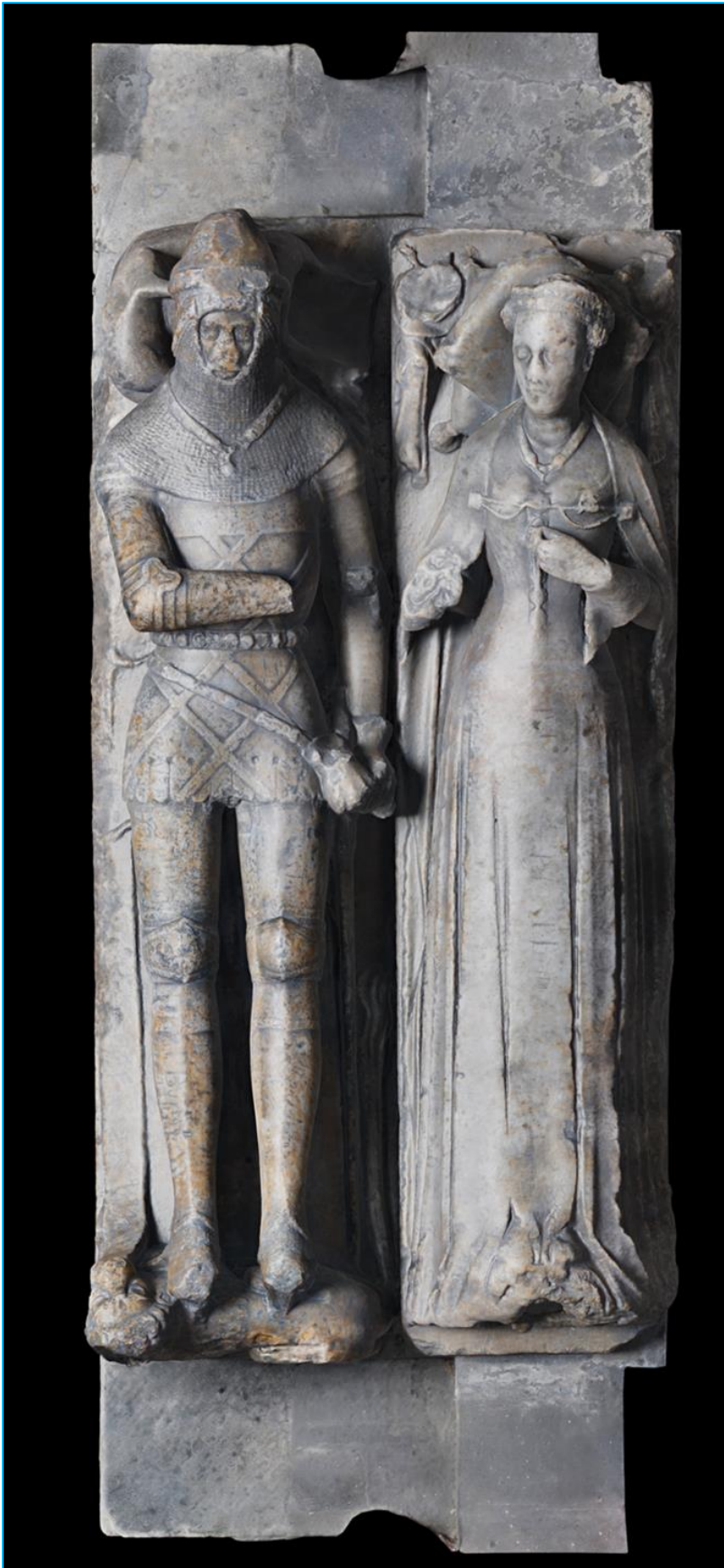


Figure 4 Alabaster effigy at Broughton Lincolnshire, photogrammetry. Photo: © C.B. Newham.

Figure 5 Brass of c. 1490 to an unknown civilian and wife, Brown Candover (Hampshire). Photo: © Martin Stuchfield.



Figure 6 Low relief slab to an unknown couple of c. 1280, Winterbourne Bassett (Wiltshire). Photo: © C.B. Newham.



Figure 7 Brass to Robert Haitfield and his wife Ade (d. 1409), Owston (Yorkshire).
Photo: © Martin Stuchfield.

in support. Judging from canopy arch design and the foliage on the slab, it is much more likely to date from the 1280s. This should be regarded as an outlier chronologically, however, as the sequence does not begin in earnest in England until the early 1360s.

The author argues persuasively that the hand-joining pose represents not the state of matrimony as frequently argued hitherto, but rather the actual ceremony of marriage, the moment when the joining of hands set the seal on the mutual exchange of consent. Of course, marriage, as a consequence of a love match cannot have been

common among couples of a status to have been memorialised by tomb monuments in the medieval period. Marriages were arranged by parents and guardians, with the main considerations being mutually beneficial enrichments of status, money, and property. This is implicitly recognised by Barker in noting the prominence of wealthy heiresses among those represented adopting the pose. She suggests that part of its attraction to patrons could have been because it drew attention to the transfer of assets from the heiress's family to that of her husband. Love might nevertheless follow marriage, but it did not always do so. In some cases, there is evidence of love matches between husband and wife. Two instances are especially compelling. One is the gilt cast copper-alloy joint tomb monument of Richard II (d. 1400) and Anne of Bohemia (d. 1394) in Westminster Abbey (London), commissioned by Richard himself ten months after his beloved wife's death. More modest is the brass at Owston (Yorkshire) to Robert Haitfield and his wife Ade, commissioned on Ade's death in 1409, the inscription of which describes them as being 'fully in right love' (Fig. 7).

Yet the evidence of other examples viewed in context may indicate otherwise. The Greene tomb at Lowick (Northamptonshire) is well-known, not least because the contract for it survives. Katherine commissioned it following Ralph's death in 1417 after just three and a half years of childless marriage. The contract specifies that the couple should be shown holding each other by the hand. If she was a heart-broken widow, however, her subsequent actions, as detailed in Chapter 4, did not show it. Shortly after Ralph's death she re-married. This union with Sir Simon Felbrigge lasted for more than twenty years and was followed by a lengthy widowhood before she was buried at her own request with her second husband. Barker persuasively suggests that Katherine's choice of the hand-holding pose on the Lowick tomb may have been motivated by a need to defend the settlement she received on Ralph's death from litigation initiated by his younger brother.

Barker questions why what she regards as the loving union of husband and wife became such a popular theme in funerary sculpture in the late fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries. Factors other than martial love are suggested as also being at work, such as couples in certain areas or linked social networks preferring this type of monument. She argues that if monuments to couples are solely a reflection of exceptionally loving unions, it is hard to explain why they cluster in certain places at certain times, concluding that hand-joining monuments were both representations of new ideas about marriage and agents of change, which affected the way in which couples thought about and behaved in marital relationships.

Part of Chapter 1 discusses what she provocatively terms ‘queer tombs’, i.e. those featuring same sex couples. The title infers that the couples memorialised by the two tombs examined were in a sexual relationship, but this is hard to support. The tomb slab now in the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, is to two English knights, Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvow, who both died in 1391. Unusually, the men’s shields are shown touching one another at the inner corner and their respective arms are represented impaled on each shield. Barker argues that this impalement was used to suggest a relationship of love between the two men. Yet, in the opinion of many scholars, the Istanbul tomb slab is best interpreted as attesting to a relationship of brotherhood-in-arms, a bond of companionship based on a common affection between knights constituting a relationship in its own right in the age of chivalric knighthood, and shown in other types of iconography on monuments to military active knights who valued their links with comrades in arms.⁷ Regarding the brass at Etchingham (Sussex) to two spinsters who died decades apart, Elizabeth Etchingham (d. 1452) and Agnes Oxenbridge (d. 1480), Barker repeats Judith Bennet’s argument in examining their respective poses suggesting that they were a lesbian couple, although nothing can be certain.⁸ It would have been better to omit his questionable section.

⁷ Sigrid Düll, Andrew Luttrell and Maurice Keen, “‘Faithful unto Death’: The Tomb Slab of Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvow, Constantinople, 1391”, *Antiquaries Journal* 71 (1991), 174-90.

⁸ Judith Bennett, ‘Two Women and their Monumental Brass, c.1480’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 161 (2008), 163-84.

The section on heart burials in Chapter 2 again regards marital love as a major motivation. One case cited, however, is that of Edward II's queen, Isabella, sometimes described as the 'She-wolf of France', who had his heart buried beneath the breast of her lost effigy in the London Greyfriars. Love seems an unlikely rationale in this case. Barker implies that there could be a more sinister implication when she says it 'expressed the enduring nature of her relationship with and even ownership of the body of the King'. Evidence not cited shows, however, that love was rarely a reason for divided burials, practical considerations regarding bodily decay and the desire of the aristocracy to emphasise their wealth and influence in the course of their memorialisation being more important.⁹ For example, Edmond Cornwall, who died at Cologne in 1436, directed in his will that his servants 'bury his body there and to enclose his heart in lead and convey it to Burford [Shropshire] to be buried'; his monument survives to show that his wishes were followed. Another established impetus for the choice of divided burial was that it enabled the person memorialised to have multiple monuments in different churches, thus enhancing the opportunities for prayers to speed the soul through Purgatory. Various other aspects of marital love are examined in the book, widening and enriching the coverage of the general topic.

Of particular value is Chapter 3 on gender, agency and the much-married woman, in which examples are given of widows as patrons. These will be a beneficial new source for gender studies, in which American scholars currently lead the field. Marriage ceremonies also receive fascinating detailed study in Chapters 3 and 4, including 'licit' marriages between a spinster and a bachelor and 'illicit' second unions involving a widow or widower, these being a matter of controversy amongst contemporary theologians. Related subjects, including rings, brooches and other artefacts featuring clasped hands symbolising love, feature in Chapter 4.

⁹ Sally Badham, 'Divided in Death. The Iconography of English Heart and Entrails Monuments', *Church Monuments* 34 (2019), 16-76, esp. 22-27.

Barker's monograph will undoubtedly provoke considerable debate and some criticism, just as Laslett's did, but this is perhaps inevitable with such a pioneering work. It leads the way in the current movement urging the reappraisal of pre-Reformation monuments by what is regarded as a holistic art-historical contextualisation. New approaches have so often before led to fresh and important insights. Inevitably there are errors in interpretation and coverage in the text, but this should not diminish the achievement represented by this innovative book. It is certainly essential reading for all interested in medieval church monuments. 🐼