

“Fragments & Synecdoche in the Antiquarian Mode” — RBS/UVa ABSTRACT

The writing that emerged from my time in Heather Wolfe’s RBS course, “The Handwriting & Culture of Early Modern English Manuscripts,” now forms my dissertation’s first chapter. Titled “Shoring Fragments, circa 1605,” this chapter examines the defining trope of what my dissertation calls the seventeenth-century’s antiquarian mode: synecdoche. I argue that fragmented things (stones, monuments, epitaphs, potsherds, etymologies, and bones) were of emblematic significance for antiquaries in seventeenth-century England and that early modern antiquarianism, rather than mounting a piecemeal effort to reconstruct the past, accessed the past by way of rhetorical synecdoche: from gathered parts, antiquaries inferred the whole, more Rorschach than jigsaw.

The first third of my chapter reexamines Francis Bacon’s (and empiricism’s) influence on early modern antiquarianism and seeks to moderate existing scholarship that characterizes Bacon as openly hostile to antiquaries and their methods. Historians of antiquarianism have traditionally interpreted Bacon’s list of ‘antiquities’ in Book II of the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) as evidence of Bacon’s general “tone of disparagement.”¹ I see Bacon differently and find evidence across his writing of a sympathetic engagement with the work of his antiquarian contemporaries.

The middle third of my chapter theorizes *fragment* and rediscovers one of its most evocative early modern synonyms: *relic* (*reliques*). This synonymy leads me to compare antiquarianism to reliquary devotion in period. Like relics, I argue, antiquarian fragments reward close looking and imaginative gap-filling. While the desiccated and blackened finger of a saint placed on silk beneath a crystal monstrance is designed to evoke the absent presence of a contiguous arm, elbow, body, and being, a potsherd prompts thoughts of an absent pot, its evaporated contents, and the culture and situation of its use, making, and discard. Both relics and antique fragments operate as synecdoches.

The final third of my chapter turns to consider William Camden’s printed collection of antiquities, *Remains concerning Britain* (1605). In a close reading of two of its nineteen chapters, I argue that Camden’s *Remains* makes a case for the epistemological potential in fragmented artifacts and demonstrates the mental and writerly ‘instruments’—etymology, synecdoche, conjecture—that antiquaries use in their successful ventriloquy of the past; in Camden’s words, the *Remains* tells us how to make silent fragments yield “their testimonie.”² Employing my newfound paleographical skills, I conclude by noting the extent and complexity of readerly engagement with Camden’s text. Marginal and interlinear interventions in the approximately thirty copies of the *Remains* I’ve examined so far suggest that Camden’s loquaciously-penned readers were inspired to undertake antiquarian research and gathering of their own.

I welcome inquiries, input, and ideas for collaboration. Contact me at svl6fy@virginia.edu.

¹ Peter N. Miller *History and Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture since 1500*. (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2017), page 246.

² William Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1610), ¶4r-v