

An Outside View

Illustrations to the 1926 Subscribers' Edition of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the illustrations, photographic and artistic, produced and commissioned by T. E. Lawrence for the publication of the subscribers' edition of Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph. This book is contextualised in relation to developments in photographic technology and publishing conventions of travel narratives. Bibliographic aspects of Seven Pillars of Wisdom are then analysed as an aesthetic object that is the result of collective labour and, it is argued, produces spatial paradigms through the interaction of textual and imagistic mediation.

THE USE OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN MASS-PRODUCED TRAVEL NARRATIVES had become commonplace, if not to say accepted practice, by the early twentieth century. From the time that the daguerrotype process was publicly demonstrated in 1839, photography became an increasingly accessible technology that developed to the point that cameras were available for the general public, rather than just professional, use. Developments in the printing process allowed the development of the illustrated press and an increase in the number of illustrated books, so that images as well as texts could be widely disseminated at a progressively lower cost. The sale of images through picture postcards, engravings taken from photographs, photograph albums and calling cards (*cartes de visite*), illustrated magazines, books and newspapers and the increasingly popular educational lectures illustrated by magic lantern or projection of glass photographic plates contributed to what Kate Flint, among others, considers symptomatic of a period characterised by a fascination with the ocular. Flint links this fascination with the prevailing mode of representation in painting and literature, that of the accretion of detail as a way of establishing materiality with a concomitant encoding of values (FLINT 2000, 2). This detailed representation has been identified by the critic Peter Brooks and others as con-

stitutive of the “dominant nineteenth-century tradition, that of realism, [which] insistently insistently makes the visual the master relation to the world, for the very premise of realism is that one cannot understand human beings outside the context of the things that surround them” (BROOKS 1993, 88). This statement might profitably be extended to the realm of travel writing, in which the narrator aims to mediate themselves as well as the environments they encounter.

In his essay, “The Book As Physical Object”, Keith Smith argues that “[t]he best approach to gain a sense of the book is to become acquainted with the book as a physical object”, yet the experience of reading an illustrated book in particular is not so much with an inert object to be appreciated at arm’s length, but with a sensory environment constituted by textual imagery and the successive display of vantage points and objects of the illustrations. Printing techniques and aspects of the physical book contribute to this visual ecology, resulting in a readerly construction of an aesthetic environment drawing on the collective output of author, printers, and illustrators. It is as just such an aesthetic environment that this essay will seek to understand the 1926 subscribers’ edition of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, T. E. Lawrence’s account of his role in the Arab Revolt during the First World War. This was a volume produced at great expense—famously, each copy of this text made Lawrence a loss of double its cost of production—as well as effort, with careful consideration of every aesthetic aspect of the book. In order to analyse how these decisions work together to form an aesthetic whole, this article will consider its context in terms of the development of photography as the dominant illustrative mode for travel literature before moving on to an analysis of Lawrence’s own use of this medium before engaging with elements such as layout, typography, decoration and, finally, a series of illustrations produced by Eric Kennington.

Travel and Photography

Although the illustrations to the text are, for the most part, composed of paintings, pastels, drawings and prints, Lawrence’s choice of these as dominant media must be understood within the publishing context of the early Twentieth Century. This is particularly relevant for an author who was himself a photographer and who chose carefully the photographs that were eventually included in his masterpiece. From its very genesis, cameras are a technology closely association with travel and exploration. As James

R. Ryan outlines in his influential work, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*, photography was closely associated with cartography as a visual technology that reduced the world to two dimensions, making it more readily comprehensible. Because of its apparent capacity for mimetic fidelity, it was seen as a useful addition to the technologies and methods of cartographers and, as Ryan argues, after its invention, the camera “was soon part of an ambitious collective enterprise of visual survey” (RYAN 1997, 21–23). The production of photographs to record the appearance of foreign landscapes during the course of exploratory expeditions was soon common practice and the resulting images became an important part of the narration of these expeditions and the production and dissemination of geographical knowledge.

After Louis Daguerre’s publication in 1839 of the description of and instruction for Daguerrotypes, photographs by Europeans of foreign lands proliferated. Calotypes (also known as Talbotypes after their inventor, William Henry Fox Talbot), which were in use for about a decade starting in the 1840s, entailed the use of bulky equipment and much technical skill to develop often poorly-focused images on sensitized paper. The wet plate collodion process, invented in 1851, was more economical and produced better images but necessitated the use of even more cumbersome paraphernalia, making it unsuitable for use by travellers. By the 1860s though, cameras were routinely brought on survey and scientific expeditions, continuing the practice of producing illustrative scenic views of foreign topography, albeit through a new medium (RYAN 1997, 27–29).

The Levant and Holy Land, which had already been visually presented to the British public through engravings and (often historical) paintings, now became the subject of photographers. Most of the early photographic images of the region were produced by professionals and destined for sale in hotels, where they could be purchased by tourists as single images or as pre-assembled albums that presented their consumers with a stable visual narrative of the region. One example of such an album was that produced on the occasion in 1862 of the Prince of Wales—later King Edward VII—four-month tour from Cairo to Istanbul. The photographer Francis Bedford was one of those responsible for documenting the journey and his visual record provides not just personal promotion for his employer but an interpretation of the historical sites and landscapes taken in by the tour. As Stephanie Spencer argues in her study of Bedford, he contributed to a representational practice of the region that insinuated a contemporary and historical British presence, whether that be through mediation of the Prince or the British Governor’s house, or by a focus on crusader castles

or the camping sites of Richard the Lionheart. Bedford's work typifies the processes by which the landscape of the region was photographically represented to British consumers: by making choices about the subject matter, scale, framing and composition of their picture, "the photographer was able simultaneously to recover and to define the nature of the past" and influence how the foreign country was perceived at home (SPENCER 2011, 158).

Appropriation of vestiges of the historical past through visual and textual selection and framing of photographically-illustrated travel narratives was commonplace within the scope of British cultural imperialism but it was also how the Victorians in particular represented Britain itself to British readers. As has been noted by Helen Groth, "To see and to write increasingly meant to decode and decipher secret histories encrypted just beneath the surface of the visible" and photography was increasingly seen as a sort of "natural magic" that could bring the past to life in great accuracy and detail, "transcending the limitations of hand or machine" (GROTH 2003). The possible role of cameras in conservation of historical buildings and in the recording of the present for posterity is evident in the establishment of photographic record societies: in 1890, the Scottish Photograph Survey was set up, followed in 1897 by the National Photographic Record Association, which sent the material it produced to the British Museum. Such societies, set up for the accurate recording of sites deemed to be of beauty or historical worth—and therefore of national interest and possible financial benefit—were to some degree analogous in their goals to the National Trust, established in 1895. These societies and institutions purportedly aimed to preserve and safeguard the buildings and monuments of the British aristocracy and wealthy from the encroachments of urban sprawl (KERR 1983, 39). Central to the strategies of this body were the techniques of accurate recording of these places and their mediation through publications and exhibitions.

Perhaps because of the existing interest in studying the regions' antiquity, photographs of Egypt, the Holy Land, Mesopotamia and Iran proliferated in line with the development of photographic and printing technology. It was these nations' ancient historical sites that frequently formed the subject of the images produced of the earliest travelling photographers, fuelled by the Victorian mania for collecting and the rapid growth in tourism and consequently of commercial photographers in tourist destinations. At home, professional photographers' products were used in instructive lectures and illustrated books, magazines and newspapers (MICKLEWRIGHT 2003, 76). In reading the resulting images, their cultural and physical conditions of production must be acknowledged; each is the result of a series of choices

about subject matter, its framing, light, exposure time and often the placement and selection of human figures, whether natives offered up to the viewer for scale or local colour, or westerners included to provide a contrast of cultural texture. Spencer argues that such photography functions as part of a Victorian impulse to select and protect physical manifestations of a particular set of judgements about natural beauty, cultural and historical value, often against what were characterised as inevitable physical depredations inherent in the environments photographed. "In identifying what was typical and characteristic, the photographer created or at least influenced how the foreign country and culture would be known by the home audience" (SPENCER 2011, 152). Photographs thus functioned as records of a landscape whose contemporaneity was consistently obfuscated by the photographers' selective gaze. Within the narrative of British cultural imperialism, these illustrative records attest to and apparently authenticate the rationalising, imperial gaze of the learned foreign traveller. This establishment of conventions of visual representation of the Orient contributed to a graphical extension of British collective memory within the British imperialist cultural idiom, reflecting the spread of its imperial influence and territory.

It is within the context of the importance of photography in the publication of travel narratives in particular that *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* must be read. Its illustrations were either specially commissioned by Lawrence or, in the case of many of the portraits, permission was gained by him from the owners of the artworks to include them in the book. He did, however, produce many photographs himself and the Lawrence archive in the Bodleian Library has several of his photograph albums. Some of the pictures from these were instrumental in the production of the illustrations, as he would frequently show them to the artists he commissioned, so that the results draw compositional elements and details from photographs. For instance, in a letter to Eric Kennington of August 1922, Lawrence expresses his desire to commission images of "A group of five of us being taught Stokes" gunning on Akaba beach by an English sargeant-instructor" and "A group of Arabs (mainly Ageyl in cotton shirts) drawing water from a well. A fine confused group, mainly of backs and arms". He states that he "can supply a photograph" for each of these images and for the second of these he suggests that he himself serve as a model in addition, as he has "all the kit, and know[s] how to wear it, and the face might be taken from anyone else" so that the artist, Clark, could "make such sketches (? efforts, diagrams, studies . . .) as he needed". On one hand, this use of photography as a compositional foundation for certain illustrations shows a concern for

verisimilitude in the depiction of events, while on the other, the adaptation of the photograph into a different medium highlights the vector through which the scene or event is communicated. The resulting combination of text and artwork is an interplay of the aims for accuracy of depiction and veracity of process that give as truthful a representation as possible while simultaneously making plain the subjectivity of this representation.

A few photographs do appear in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. One, “MUDOWWARA: from the air” is a composite of several aerial photographs, “used by [Robin] Buxton as an operations map”, which Lawrence thought would be “helpful and rather jolly if inserted in the book”. Another, “Entering Damascus”, is an image crowded with horses and their riders. In the middle ground, the vertical lines of five rifles mark out a sparse rhythm amid the chaos, which gives the viewer a sense of being enveloped in the crowd of irregular soldiers. The most significant group of photographs contains only five images (though this is more generous than Lawrence’s original intention, which was to include only two or three). It constitutes a negligible proportion of the total body of illustrations yet it is marked out by its divergence in subject matter—all five are urban scenes, whereas the rest are all decorations, landscapes or portraits, often in a landscape setting. These photographs are characterised by their vertically-oriented compositions, which further underline their difference from the horizontal lines of the landscapes and, when in combination with the high contrast and framing effect of the deep shadow and stark light, give a sense of the closeness of Jeddah’s narrow streets crowded by tall buildings. Few human figures appear in these images; these function more as scalar references and compositional elements chosen to better illustrate the architecture of Jeddah rather than its inhabitants.

The description of Jeddah in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* reflects the photographs closely and constitutes one of the first extended spatial descriptions of the book. Lawrence’s first impression is formed in the mid-day heat and humidity of the port town, when the sun “put to sleep the colours”, “The atmosphere was like a bath” and “In the air, from the men to the dates and back to the meat, squadrons of flies like particles of dust danced up and down the sunshafts”. He describes the cooler, afternoon streets as eerily empty, with doors that shut as he passes, “like a dead city, so clean underfoot, and so quiet”. Architecturally, the style is “like crazy Elizabethan half-timber work, in the elaborate Cheshire fashion, but gone gimgrack to an incredible degree. House-fronts were fretted, pierced and pargetted till they looked as though cut out of cardboard for a romantic stage-setting” (29–33). This description, verified by the photographic series



Image 1. Jidda—Street Scene. Reproduced with permission.

that appears in the book after the close of the narrative, sets a “romantic stage-setting” that is empty and, though outlandish, defined in terms readily understandable within a British cultural discourse. The photographs are so readily compared with the description of Jeddah that it seems very likely, particularly as he possessed them before he began the third version of *The Seven Pillars*, that he would have used them as a reference for his writing, just as he encouraged the commissioned artists to use them as reference material for their work.

An Illustrated, Ideal, Titanic Volume

It is impossible to analyse the visual elements of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* without reference to Lawrence’s attitude to medievalism. He claims to have carried only three books with him during the Arabian campaign: the comedies of Aristophanes, the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*. This passion had developed from his boyhood, when he had been a voracious reader of medieval romances and an expert on details of costume, armour and heraldry, which developed later into research into the research on Medieval defensive architecture of his undergraduate dissertation. Part of the popular myth of Lawrence that developed in his lifetime was based on his apparent adoption of chivalric values; he was not considered “content to play at being a knight of the Holy Grail without binding himself [. . .] to the same rules of chastity and temperance and gentleness that Malory’s Galahad had kept”. This medievalism became part of a characterisation of his Arab contemporaries as *actually* medieval, in a typically orientalist denial of coevalness (FABIAN 1983). Lawrence’s characterisation of Auda abu Tayi is undeniably influenced by these values; Robert Graves describes him as having a more natural medievalism than Lawrence, “The Middle Ages being not yet over in Arabia when he was born” (GRAVES 1927, 158–163). This medievalism extended also to the author’s aesthetic choices when preparing the text of *The Seven Pillars* for publication.

Its design shows the clear influence of the Kelmscott Press and its founder, William Morris. Lawrence had had a strong interest in printing since he was an undergraduate and had at that time even expressed this interest in the intention to start a press, along the lines Morris set out, together with his friend Vyvyan Richards. In his short volume on Lawrence as a book designer, Richards recalls these principles and indicates how much the process of producing the physical *Seven Pillars* — that is, the book as an object,

a combination of textual and visual design elements—depended upon them. The pair had visited the Arts and Crafts house at Broad Campden, commissioned by May Morris in accordance with the aesthetic values set out by her father, in order to view its collection of Kelmscott books, particularly an edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Richards writes of the viewing this book, which "lay open on a lectern made specially for it" as a formative experience that underlined the "significance of the printing of his own book for Lawrence" (RICHARDS 1985, 12–13). The pivotal element of the image invoked by Richards is that of an open volume "lying quietly" on a surface according to the dictum made by Morris in his lecture on the elements of the ideal book. According to these, it is the pair of facing, open pages that constitute the aesthetic unit which, in its multiplicity, makes up a book as an object.

These dicta concern multiple design elements, so that a book produced according to them might aspire to "become a work of art second to none, [. . .] or a fine piece of literature" (MORRIS 1982, 73). According to these ideals, then, the ideal book in Morris's terms is of a separate aesthetic category to one whose design has not been as consciously considered and can thus amount only to a literary rather than an artistic work. Morris dictates numerous aspects of bibliographic appearance: briefly, these concern the quality of the paper; the position of the printed block of text on the paper; the type, spaces between words, letters and lines; ornamentation, which should be integral to both the page and to the scheme of the whole book; the size of the book, which should ideally be a folio as this "lies quiet and majestic on the table, waiting kindly till you please to come to it, with its leaves flat and peaceful, giving you no trouble of body, so that your mind is free to enjoy the literature which its beauty enshrines" (MORRIS 1982, 72).

In the subscribers' edition of *The Seven Pillars*, the layout of the printed field over a pair of pages, the wide margins, the heavy paper used and the type all result from conscious decisions made by Lawrence. He specifies that it be printed in "eleven point or fourteen point, of a type approximating to O. F. Caslon, unlead: with side-headings in side margin; no top-heading, lines not long, but print-panel taller than usual in quartos". He is similarly exacting about the paper, which should "be a thin decent rag brand, hand-made or machine-made of similar quality. Not perfectly bleached: - a tone of yellow or mud in it" (LAWRENCE 1923, original emphasis). The decision to use the Caslon type, a font designed in the Eighteenth Century and much favoured by members of the Arts and Crafts movement, was made after Richards and Lawrence compared a number of the finely-bound and printed volumes in his collection and settled on a "beautiful little Bunyan

of C. R. Ashbee” as the most beautiful. The use of side-headings, which are printed in red, show a direct aesthetic descent from the works produced by the Kelmscott Press and the type of paper specified, which involved further labour and cost as it needed to be dampened and stretched in order to take the ink properly, are in accordance with the same. Richards also describes how Lawrence, far from simply decorating his text, considered the appearance of his book, once he had written it (and indeed, at times despaired of it as a great literary work—he had had ambitions to write a “Titanic” book comparable to *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Moby Dick*. In a letter to David Garnett, the literary editor, who had just read *The Seven Pillars*, he wrote “that modesty comes out more in the performance than the aim!” to be of equal importance to the text (LAWRENCE 1938, 149). In order to achieve the ideal layout, he “worked out” the “rivers” of white spaces between words and “bad paragraph space” by rewriting “the text, sentences and even whole paragraphs and pages, again and again, until it was forced to fit the perfect page”, “remorselessly lopped and stretched it to fit a typographical ideal” (RICHARDS 1985, 14–16). Even a cursory perusal of the volume reveals the careful placement of decorative illustrations, which are always preceded by a full stop so that they can be viewed without the sense of interruption that images inserted into a body of text—rather than designed to be displayed on a specific spread (pair of open pages) or with a particular passage—can entail. Lawrence’s purposeful and conscious commissioning of these images and his subsequent alterations of the text in order to accommodate them in terms of layout and reflect them in terms of meaning suggest that it is possible to perform fruitful close readings of these pages of the *The Seven Pillars*.

A book’s structure dictates that the text be read and the images viewed in a relatively intimate way, as this is limited, firstly, by the length of the viewer’s arm and the limitations of human vision, and, secondly, by the relative size and weight of the volume in relation to its immediate display to the reader’s eyes—be that upon a table, in the hands or a reading rest (SMITH 2000, 61). The 1926 subscribers’ edition of *The Seven Pillars*, because of its size, because of Lawrence’s specifications about binding and paper weight, it is a Titanic book at least physically, but these details also affect how the reader must approach the book; the tooled leather and gilt lettering, which give the first impression of the book as it stands on a shelf or lays on a table, make a claim that the volume be understood a priori as belonging to the category of books which would customarily be bound at such expense—artists’ books or fine editions of literary works—encouraging the reader to make these assumptions about the textual contents of

the covers before opening them. This is reinforced by the weight of the subscribers' edition—it is certainly a book that will “lie quietly” and the feel of its compact mass in the hands prepares the mind for the implied feat of endurance of reading it.

In *The Seven Pillars*, the printed fields of each spread are framed by generous, broad margins, while the inclusion of bloomers and illustrations give a sense of isolating these fields—and the narrative they encode—from the surroundings of the reader. Further, the printed areas are presented as flat, dense rectangles of text: the lack of rivers; the narrowness of the spaces between the lines; Lawrence's care that each paragraph should end on the second half of the line; the shallow indentation of each new paragraph and that most pages should conclude with a full stop create a visually impermeable surface. The uneven edges of the pages, because they have been left raw (in the copy consulted, the top edge is gilt and the outer and lower edge are untrimmed), mean that turning each page often requires a moment of distraction from the narrative. As Steve McCaffery and bpNichol have suggested, in prose works “the page becomes an obstacle to be overcome” and in this sense, the physical book—in the sense of the ideal book that *The Seven Pillars* can be considered—becomes not only the repository for narrative, but, arguably, a microcosmic and densely-coded journey through the spatial representations of the printed pages. In the majority of prose works, the fields of printed text form a temporal structure, because of the “working out of information through duration”, inherent in the two-dimensional encoding of “a hypothetical oral activity: a speech line running from a point of commencement to an end” through the “depth module” extending over the surfaces of the layered pages of books. In contrast to this, the subscribers' edition of *The Seven Pillars* gives “optical significance” to many of its pages, leaning more towards the formal visual expression of short poems, which are perceivable on the page as visual wholes. In this expression, the page “ceases to function as an *arbitrary* receptacle, or surface for the maximum number of words it can contain [. . .], becoming instead the frame, landscape, atmosphere within which the poem's own unity is enacted and reacted upon” (McCAFFERY and NICHOL 2000, 18–19). The page, then, in combination with the printed field, type and decoration, function together as visual elements of an aesthetic setting, upon the surface of which the speech line of narrative extends and is folded, and whose design cannot but affect the way in which the narrative is read.

The majority of the illustrations do not in fact illustrate events or themes detailed in the printed text. Most show thematically-appropriate images, rather than entire scenes, or illustrate incidental events such as the

communal bedouin meal, groups of camels or stylized human figures with only an oblique relevance to the text. Obvious exceptions to this observation are Eric Kennington's satirical line drawings and Roberts' "Kham-sin", an image of three bedouin heads wrapped up against the sandstorm described in the text of the opposite page. The mostly tenuous relationship of these line-drawings and wood-cuts to their immediately surrounding narrative, together with their diminutive size, lack of intricate detail and relative tonal weight, conforms with Morris' ideas about decorations not drawing undue attention from the text and indeed allow them to be seen as diversions from reader's progression through the text, or as picturesque vantage points, forming its "frame, landscape, atmosphere". These views and the larger illustrations dominate the appearance of *The Seven Pillars* and Lawrence's decision to engage Kennington as its artistic editor is of great import.

Kennington's illustrations and Lawrence's "raree show"

The two met in November 1920, when Lawrence attended an exhibition of Kennington's works, purchasing two drawings and leaving his card. This introduction led soon enough—aided by the romanticised version of Lawrence's role in the Arab Campaign presented on screen at the Royal Albert Hall the previous year—to Kennington agreeing to travel with Lawrence to the Middle East to draw portraits of some of the individuals featured in *The Seven Pillars* (BLACK 2001, 27). As he later wrote in an exhibition catalogue for Kennington's pastel portraits, "[t]his book was something for the future, but it was an outside view, from an odd angle, and words, especially an amateur's words, are unsatisfactory to describe persons. It seemed to us that it would be balanced somewhat by an expert view, from another angle: and so Kennington went out to correct my men" (LAWRENCE 1939, 15). Here, Lawrence indicates part of his justification for including illustrations, and particularly for engaging Kennington as artistic editor for the work: a desire for objectivity.

Kennington's work as a war artist during the First World War aimed to represent the experience of soldiers at the front, compromising between communicating the dire conditions and yet not negatively impacting civilian morale. During the war, he lived as an equal among the men of the 24th Infantry Division, a New Army unit of Kitchener volunteers, even contracting trench fever—"he was convinced his duty lay in 'depicting

British soldiers in their truest and noblest aspect” (BLACK 2001, 5–7). Kennington’s apparent desire to represent the realities of war and his figurative approach to this subject matter were part of what attracted Lawrence to his artistic output and these values would have chimed with the romantic-chivalric values he himself espoused. Indeed, Kennington’s work, particularly the group of portraits included in *The Seven Pillars* known as the “Arab pastels”, can be understood from the perspective of Lawrence’s own compromise between the conflicting demands of truthful narration and literary expression. A. J. Plotke argues that the drawings, woodcuts and pastels included take on the responsibility of “interpret[ing] faithfully the truth at which [Lawrence’s] prose only hinted”. This truth, read as a combination of the textually-mediated narration and multiplicity of images presented to the reader within *The Seven Pillars*, is a polyvalent conception of events, one that is suggestive rather than explicit. Thus, as Plotke suggests, the intention of this polyphony of text and image is to “convey the crashing chaos of the time and place to a reader who could never otherwise comprehend it” (PLOTKE 1984, 176). Indeed, this might be read as a visual example of what authorial “*verve*” in response to the “inherently anxiogenic” subject matter of war, which Kate McLoughlin has argued convincingly as a subject that “resists depiction [. . .] in multifarious ways” (McLOUGHLIN 2011, 6–7). Plotke argues further that the varied placement of images between individual copies (particularly Kennington’s “Cactus” and Paul Nash’s “Prophet” Tomb”) to avoid a definitive and therefore collectable first edition of the book contributes to the internal chaos within each individual volume. In this interpretation, the truth aimed at comes nearest to expression through an increasingly babel-like publishing project reflecting the apparent impossibility of arriving at a straightforward veracity of narration of the experience of war.

This conflict between literary narration, epistemological certainty and the image is one that becomes even more acute with the use of photography as visual corollary to the text. Further, the perception of this medium as a mechanism that could apparently render both gaze and image purely objective seems exemplary of the positivist equation of seeing and knowing. Karen Jacobs, in her study of modernist visual culture, characterises the period as one in which a crisis in epistemology was experienced—in, for example, philosophical explorations of the subjectivising consequences of the embodiment of vision by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. Photography, with its apparent mechanical objectivity, would seem to be a counterpoint to this, albeit one that is inherently and inevitably compromised by the conflict between “its optical truths and visual pleasures”.

Jacobs argues that modernist literary innovation typically compromised between these modes with what she terms an “interior gaze”—that is, “a positivist fantasy of the availability of visual truths by strategically conceding their difficulty of access” (JAKOBS 2001, 19). It is this interior gaze, directed towards the people and environment depicted, that might be said to characterise the subscribers’ edition of *The Seven Pillars*. Lawrence’s decision, firstly, to provide a visual as well as textual depiction, and secondly, to largely eschew the use of photographs—though he had many that would serve the purpose in his possession—in favour of the manifestly subjective interpretations available in the works of visual art presented instead. These images are all stylized to some degree, thus offering just such a concession to the difficulty of nearing a truthful account.

Arguably, the heteroglossically-rendered textual and visual narration offered in *The Seven Pillars* can only ever *tend* towards an accurate and objective version of events but never attain it. Because it self-consciously presents itself as such, it can be understood as being produced from a British collectively-inhabited interior gaze towards the Arabian Desert. Where the contribution of Lawrence’s prose to the rendering of the effects and setting of the book are concerned, the caveats he includes in the opening pages indicate its subjectivity and incompleteness as an historical account. He makes clear in the introductory chapter that *The Seven Pillars* is to be understood as “the history not of the Arab movement, but of [him] in it” and as an “isolated picture throwing the main light upon [himself]”. Calling it a “history” rather than a memoir or journal implies that it is to be taken as a definitive account, even if only of the actions of one man, while the acknowledgement of its limited focus destabilises the concreteness of its historicity. Further, such manoeuvres in the introductory section include the admission in its final paragraph that it is at most a partial truth and the continuation of a personal policy towards his British superior officers and the falseness of their position towards the Arabs: he refuses “rewards for being a successful trickster and [. . .] began in my reports to conceal the true stories of things, and to persuade the few Arabs who knew to an equal reticence. In this book also, for the last time, I mean to be my own judge of what to say”. It is because of its clearly stated nature as a personal account, infected with the prejudices and experiences of its author, that the book must be read as economical with the truth, but in a way that, it is claimed, stems from a personal opposition to the “falseness” of defeating Turkey so “that the corn and rice and oil of Mesopotamia might be ours”. Refracting “the main light” thrown upon himself in his text by including other cre-

ative contributions is perhaps a method of adding to the concealed “true stories of things”, the reticence and concealment.

If *The Seven Pillars* is to be understood as an entity produced by collaborative effort of multiple craftsmen in the Morrisian ideal, then it is necessary to consider the visual works—as constitutive of a collective artistic whole—produced by the artists commissioned. Eric Kennington’s work as art editor for the book meant working with Lawrence for several years and developing a personal relationship with both author and text, so his responses to the prose in his pastels, watercolours and pencil drawings are worth examining in detail. One series of his images in particular will be considered here, “Dysentery”, “Nightmare”, “Thinking”, and “Tafas”. These are Blakeian visionary, figurative interpretations of specific passages of Lawrence’s prose, dominated by primary colours and large fields of dark grey-blue. In a letter in December 1923, Lawrence termed them “imaginations, tragic and comic” that were

too good to misuse with the text . . . though we may put them not with the colour-collection at the end, but sandwiched in between pages of clean paper, in the intervals between their respective books. [. . .] Nightmare and Dysentery come into the same book, and in that case would follow one another. (1923: 46)

That he considered including them in the body of the book rather than in its appended colour prints indicates that Lawrence thought of these illustrations more closely related to the text than the others.

Kennington’s watercolours are situated amid a group of drawings, prints and paintings that form the visual ecology against which they can be read. All four are clearly titled and referenced to the chapter they pertain to, but they do indeed appear in the “colour-collection” after a lengthy section of pastel portraits of British military figures involved in the Arab campaign and the Arab men who Lawrence knew, finishing with a portrait of the author himself. Kennington’s four watercolours are interspersed and surrounded in the main by landscapes, many of which are monochromatic or use a single colour: Paul Nash’s “Waterfall” and “Mountains” are simplified and stylised landscapes that make sparse use of blue and teal; Slater’s “El Sakhara” is a draughtsmanlike pencil landscape; Clarke’s “Stoke’s gun-class”, as examined above, is another work in pencil, as is Kennington’s “trata”, which shows personified landscape features in combination with a Vorticist-like composition and use of line. This group of pictures stands in

stark visual contrast to the rich tones and compositional values of Kennington's watercolour group. The fourth watercolour, "Tafas", which shows a night-time bombing of that town, is located between the painting "Turk Troops Bombed in Wadi Farra", an oil painting of an aerial bombardment of a green wadi (a valley or watercourse), with the small clouds of anti-aircraft gun fire mingled with those produced by the bombardment by the two aircraft in the centre. The final image, if the end-papers are not considered, is a photograph, examined above, "Entering Damascus". The sequencing of this final group of pictures, then, constitutes a triumphant visual narrative that confirms the book's linguistic code.

In order to gain a full understanding of the relationship of the bibliographic to the linguistic code of *The Seven Pillars*, it would be useful to examine in greater depth a few of the pictures included in this sequence. Kennington's watercolours, "Dysentery" and "Nightmare", rooted so close to each other as they are in Lawrence's prose of chapters 32 and 33, will be examined first. The passage to which the former is a response is describes a midday rest in a valley, in which the men "make a fire and cook a gazelle of them had fortunately shot" and the camels are couched around Lawrence's prostrate figure:

Lying angrily there, I threw a stone at the nearest, which got up and wavered about behind my head: finally it straddled its back legs and staled in wide, bitter jets; and I was so far gone with the heat and weakness and pain that I just lay there and cried about it unhelping. [. . .] I realized that on another day this halt would have been pleasant to me; for the hills were very strange and their colours vivid. The base had the warm grey of old stored sunlight; while about their crests ran narrow veins of granite-coloured stone, generally in pairs, following the contour of the skyline like the rusted metals of an abandoned scenic railway. Arslan said the hills were combed like cocks, a sharper observation. (189)

The bathetic impression of the first sentence's description of the heroic narrator's near miss by camel urination, followed by the unheroic, ineffectual crying is mitigated by his solitary meditation on the aesthetics of the surrounding landscape, lending a sense of proportion to his affliction. It is the "strange", vividly-coloured hills that give the scene its conditional pleasantness and they dominate both its comparatively lyrical description and Kennington's interpretation of it in his watercolour. That the base of the hills are "the warm grey of old stored sunlight" gives the sense of a restful, autumnal heat, rather than the "feverish wind" of the day at its zenith.

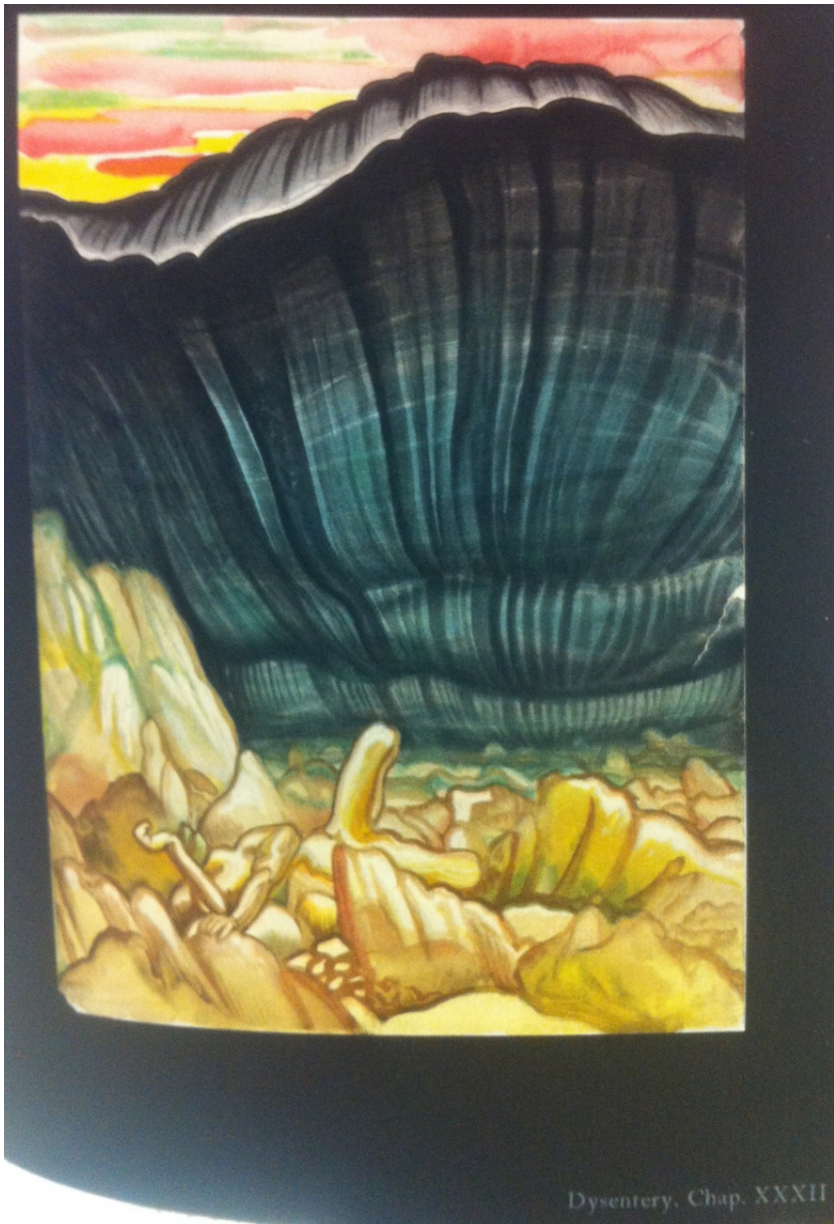


Image 2. Eric Kennington, Watercolour, "Dysentery". Reproduced with permission.

Comparing the “narrow veins” of stone particularly to those of “an abandoned scenic railway”, calls to mind a leisureliness that is in contrast to the activity of the Hejaz railway, a constant target associated with explosives and firefights. The metaphors and simile utilised each relate to an aspect of the hills’ appearance—their colour, visual texture and shape, and this with the addition of Arslan’s observation gives the sense of an attempt to achieve the most faithful rendering of the view.

Kennington’s “Dysentery”, as a response to and interpretation of this passage, can be understood as a further iteration of this pursuit of epistemological clarity—Lawrence, in a letter to D. G. Hogarth, thought it “as powerful a thing as [he had] ever set eyes on”. The painting is dominated by a field of dark blue-grey, with vertical striations and a double outline that suggests a wave or the edge of a billowing piece of cloth rather than the hills of Lawrence’s description.

He describes the ground as “of fine quartz gravel and white sand” whose “glitter thrust itself between our eyelids” and in the watercolour this foreground is laid out in tones of yellow with coral-like juttings of rock. Among these projections is a naked human figure, prone, with face shielded by forearm and an outline whose irregularity works together with the figure’s colour to camouflage him against his background. A sliver of sky above the wave-hills is coloured with vivid yellow, red and green. All of these details and the way in which they conspire to produce a landscape whose shifting significations destabilise Lawrence’s description. This destabilisation might be read as the effect on vision of a feverish mind and thus Kennington both interprets the prose directly and builds a further layer of expression upon it.

The next painting in the sequence under examination is “Nightmare”, which relates to the same period of illness as “Dysentery”. In the prose narrative, it occurs during the night of the day described above, when the illness stimulates Lawrence’s “ordinarily sluggish fancy, which ran riot this night in dreams of wandering naked for a dark eternity over interminable lava (like scrambled eggs gone iron-blue, and very wrong), sharp as insect-bites underfoot; and with some horror, perhaps a dead Moor, always climbing after us”. The “dead moor” referred to here is a dream image stemming from Lawrence’s summary execution of Hamed, a Moroccan, who had shot an Ageyli at close quarters during a quarrel. In his description of the killing, he uses three shots and describes “the blood coming out in spurts” from a shot to the chest, a second shot that “only broke his wrist” and a final shot “in the thick of his neck under the jaw”, with Hamed “calling out” and “jerk[ing] about” the while—a botched job. In the dream, the landscape is again used to figure for narrator’s state of mind—it is the

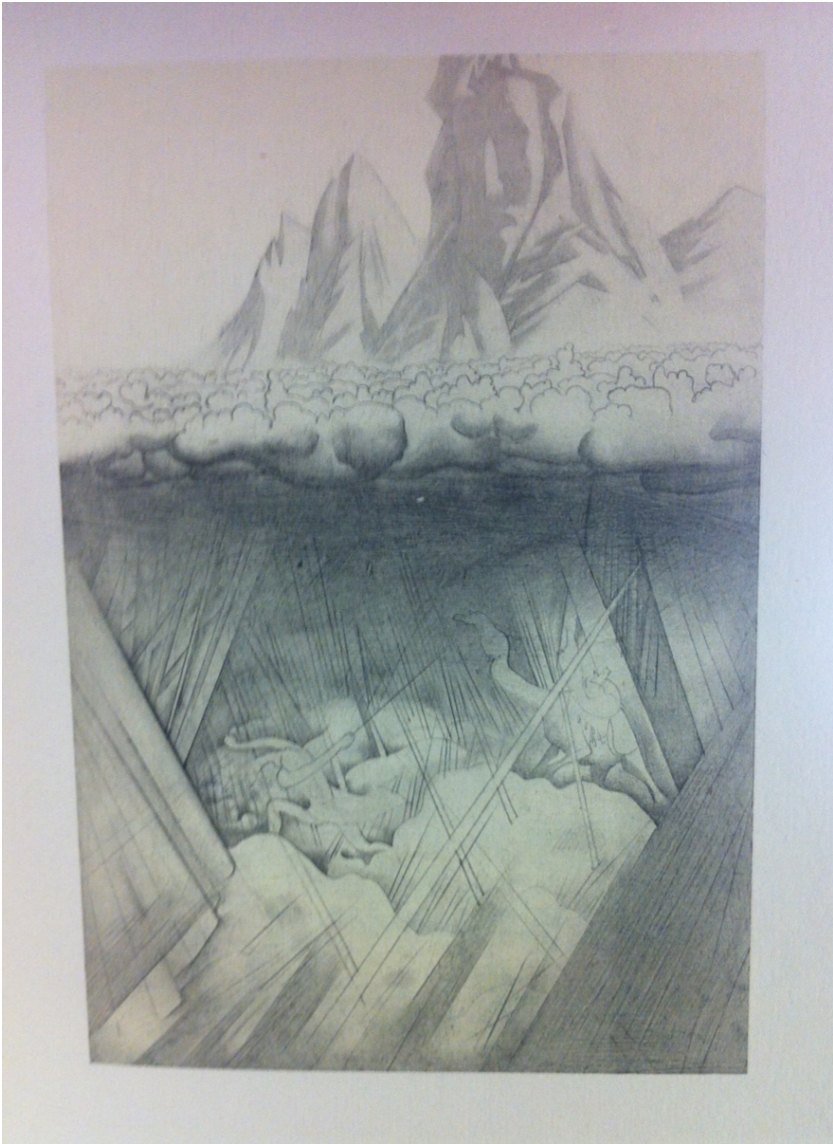


Image 3. Eric Kennington, Watercolour, "Strata". Reproduced with permission.

ground itself that is “very wrong” and it forces a penance through its “dark eternity” of sharp, biting physical pain. In addition, the *unheimlich* pursuit of the vulnerably naked Lawrence by a revived Hamed exerts a psychic threat or punishment. That he is “always climbing after us” implies the difficulty of movement through the “crambled-egg” landscape, a sluggishness that is rendered the more frustrating or frightening by the speed at which his “fancy” runs riot.

In Kennington’s visual presentation of this short passage, the scene is immediately recognisable. A flesh-pink, naked and armless homuncule topped with a torch of yellow hair runs in the foreground. His lack of arms gives air of defencelessness even further than his childlike pink, sexless nudity and compositional size while his slightly deeper pink feet imply their sensitivity to the blue-black lava floes. The figure of the “dead moor” is rendered in the same tones as the dream landscape of which he is part; his bulbous musculature and extremities repeat the shapes that render the texture of the lava while the weight of the lines used for both create a visual affinity between Hamed and the landscape, which he dominates, occupying the upper two thirds of the painting. His dismayed face, arms raised in surrender and the red, five-spurred fountain of blood from his chest pursue the Lawrence figure—a movement implied by his advanced left foot—as the representation of guilt or horror that is simultaneously a personification of the landscape and a depersonification of Hamed.

This mode is utilised again in two other of Kennington’s pictures: “trata” (known originally as “nowstorm”) and “Thinking”. In both of these, an image of a face is clearly readable in a mountain and a cloud, respectively, above the figure of a man and camel. The division of the visual plane in “trata” according to the rule of thirds—a principle of composition that makes use of the tendency of the human eye to be drawn to an area one third of the way down a page or poster—emphasises the line of clouds. Below this, the struggle of man and camel to move through a murky environment defined mainly by the ray-like lines of precipitation from the snowstorm, giving the weather a sharp, solid quality implying its violence and obstruction. Three peaks are visible above the cloud line and the foremost of these shows a solemn, wrapped-up head and shoulders, strongly reminiscent of Lawrence. This personification implies a landscape that is dominated in Kennington’s imagination by Lawrence, the high placement of whose face gives it visual dominance and strategic oversight, intimating an animistic interpretation of the landscape that accords Lawrence godlike power over while assimilating him into it, so that the imaginative geography presented by Kennington equates the geographic features of the desert

not only with Lawrence's prose but with Lawrence himself. For his part, Lawrence felt that this drawing captured "completely what at times he had felt about himself during the desert campaign" (NUTTING 1961, 243–244). In a way, this shows that Kennington's idea of the landscapes portrayed by Lawrence in *The Seven Pillars* is defined by the latter's character, as scenes composed in accordance with his descriptions rather than environments with an existence independent of his textual composition.

This effect is reiterated in "Thinking", which immediately follows "trata". Here, a sky delineated with roiling, dark clouds is dominated by a dust devil that touches down over an anonymous rider and camel and is topped by a twisted face, perhaps in caricature of Lawrence. Below the watercolour, in the border, the viewer is directed to its source, in Chapter C, in which Lawrence meditates on his role in "the Arab fraud", expressing his bitter repentance for his

"entanglement in the movement, with a bitterness sufficient to corrode my inactive hours, but insufficient to make me cut myself clear of it". It is perhaps this bitterness, shame and guilt that are represented by the dust devil in "Thinking", looming threateningly over the camel riders. In Arab folk belief, dust devils—small desert whirlwinds which in the Arabian Peninsula can grow into tall pillars—are said to be caused by the swift movement of the djinn, powerful magical beings "created out of the hot desert wind" (SHERMAN 2015, 117). In illustrated editions of *The Arabian Nights*, djinn were often related visually by illustrators as meteorological phenomena. Embodying the swirlingly negative emotions of Lawrence as a djinn-like dust devil is a reiteration of Kennington's portrayal of Lawrence's will over not just the progress of the Arab Revolt but over the environment in which it happened.

Placed between "Dysentery" and "Nightmare", and thus providing the relief of a concrete, naturalistically-depicted situation, is "tokens Gun Class". [punctuation?] It is by John Cosmo Clarke, a landscape and coastal painter who had served with the London and Middlesex regiments in the war and had been awarded the Royal Academy gold medal medal for painting in 1921. Writing to Kennington in the process of commissioning the artist, who had been chosen as a "figure man" as possessing the particular skills needed for such a composition, Lawrence wrote that he wanted an image of "a group of five of us being taught Stokes" gunning on Akaba beach by an English sargeant-instructor". He writes that he can supply a photograph, describe the details he considers relevant—"a warship, a gulf, and a grove of palm-trees"—and that Kennington's pastel studies can be consulted for details of clothing. Among the photographs in Lawrence's

archive, there is one in particular showing “Colonel Lawrence teaching a Stokes mortar class [. . .] at Akaba—Sept. “17”, upon which it might be reasonably be assumed that the Clarke drawing is based, as it contains the details Lawrence lists. The composition of the figures has changed between the two, however. Clarke’s drawing shows the figures grouped around the gun rather than in a row behind it, as in the photograph, so that the back of the (fictional) English sargeant-instructor is displayed to the viewer. The body positions of the individuals are also altered to give a more dynamic composition, so that the man in the foreground is bending down to pick up another shell, while the instructor” legs show him in a semi-squatting position and the figures are all looking skywards as if the gun had just been fired.

In Clarke’s image, then, we are presented with a group whose arrangement implies that they are unified in the same activity. Their physical proximity, likewise, implies a less hierarchical relationship than is evident from the photograph and the decision by the artist to exclude most of the indicators of the setting, again, places the thematic focus of the image on the men and their actions rather than, had more elements such as beach and warship been included, their placement as figures within a landscape composed as a setting for martial power display. In addition, Lawrence’s directions for and the execution of the drawing decrease his personal significance in the scene as revealed by the photograph, whose description clearly indicates that he is the teacher of the Stokes’ gun class. The drawing’s anonymous English sargeant-instructor is, further, depicted showing only his back so that he is identifiable only by his uniform and thus is purely a signifier of the British military. Instead of choosing a moment of the “class” when the instructor might have explained the workings of the gun to his students, enabling a more classic didactic pose, Clarke chooses to show the moment when the figures are united in looking up at the projectile that has been launched by the gun, so that the distinctions of rank and race are momentarily erased in the act of looking up.

Morris, when writing about the qualities of what he called “The Ideal Book”, stressed that these must cohere visually, in order to convey a sense of stylistic unity rather than a literary text printed and then decorated in two processes. As has been argued above, the method of production of the subscribers’ edition of *The Seven Pillars* aims at a collective process that allows the individual expression of the various artists, martialled by Kennington in the guise of artistic editor, the printer and the author, through both the content of the text and the mutual accommodation of text and ornament that Lawrence enacted. Combining these individual creative



Image 4. Eric Kennington, Watercolour, "Thinking". Reproduced with permission.

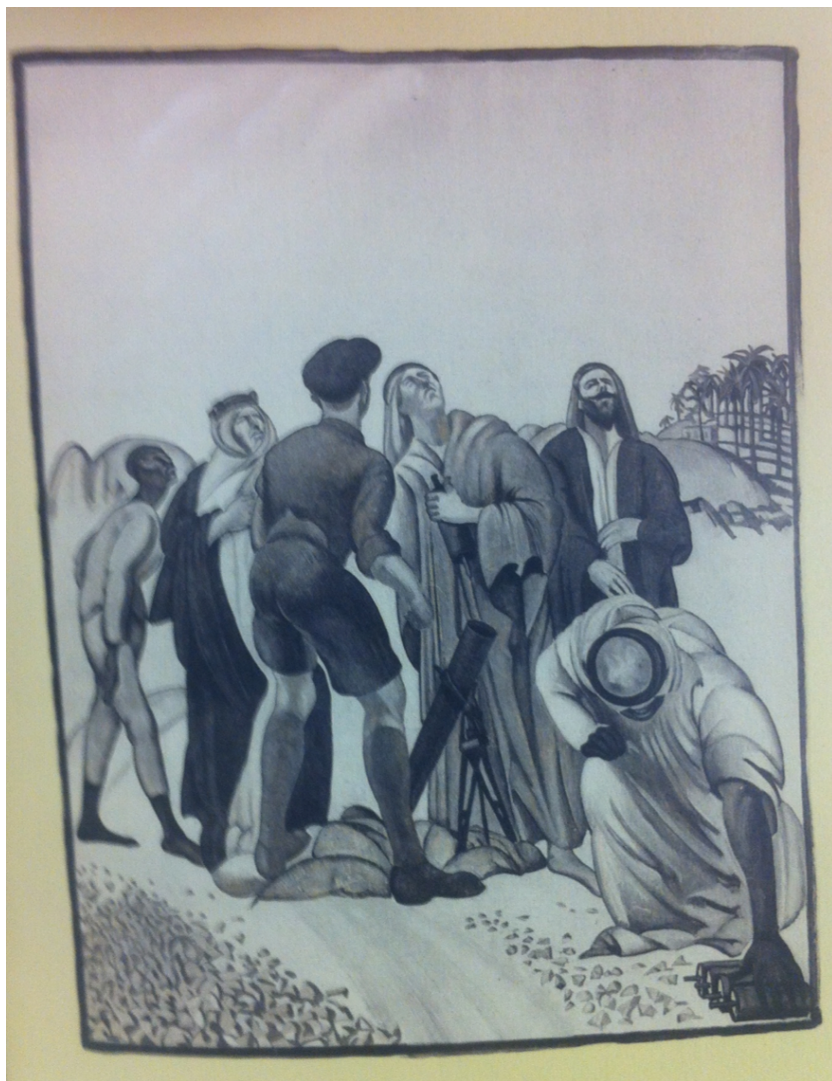


Image 5. John Cosmo Clark, Oil, "Stokes' Gun Class". Reproduced with permission.

acts produces an aesthetically coherent object. Morris writes that, in the work of printing,

The ornament must form as much a part of the page as the type itself, or it will miss its mark, and in order to succeed, and to be ornament, it must submit to certain limitations, and become *architectural*; [. . .] a book ornamented with pictures that are suitable for that, and that only, may become a work of art second to none, save a fine building duly decorated, or a fine piece of literature". (MORRIS 1982, 72–73)

Morris here writes of the well-ornamented book as an entity on a par with yet distinct from "a fine piece of literature". Of the two analogies though, his conception of the Ideal Book, when ornamented with restraint that allows the expression also of the type and other elements of the printed page, as architectural, is perhaps the more useful way of conceptualising *The Seven Pillars* (and indeed, similarly illustrated works). While the reader moves through the book visually by the act of reading, the book's physical stylistics determine how the text is apprehended. In the visual and literary ecology created by Lawrence, then, the version of the Arabian Desert produced by his book is determined through an aesthetic controlled by the joint efforts of Lawrence and Kennington. In this way, the cultural geography presented in the book can be understood as an art or museum exhibition, both in terms of the conventions of presentation and in terms of the Morrisian architectural conception of the Ideal Book.

In the same way as gallery visitors are guided through an exhibition through its design by a curator, the reader is guided through *The Seven Pillars*. The pace of the visual progress from one decoration, illustration or bloomer to another is determined by their placement in relation to the text, whose pace is of course also affected by stylistic devices. The text does not only thus influence the interpretation of each visual element by providing a signifying environment, but also forms as it were the physical bounds that structure the movement of the eyes from picture to picture. This effect is heightened by Lawrence's care in the editing of his text to accommodate the ideal placement of each decoration—because each is situated directly after the end of a paragraph, the attention is led inexorably to rest on the image. Whereas in the conventionally-illustrated text the images are placed in such a way that the reader must decide when and if to give attention to each image, which causes a break in scansion—the images and text of her works are discrete elements of the books, rather than two codes that form a unified aesthetic entity.

In 1927, an exhibition of the pastels, prints, paintings and drawings illustrating *The Seven Pillars* was held at the Leicester Galleries in London. It seems that Lawrence considered the portraits particularly significant, he calls the book a “raree show” in a 1922 letter to Kennington and in the catalogue of Kennington’s exhibition of portrait pastels, he considers that “words, especially an amateur’s words, are unsatisfactory to describe persons” and that his characterisations are “balanced somewhat by [the] expert view, from another angle” of Kennington’s portraits. A similar comparison between book and gallery or museum is made by George Bornstein, who presents the idea of the book as a “virtual museum”. He writes specifically about poetry anthologies or editions of books that differ in appearance to the first edition and these do “for poems what an art museum does for art objects: it removes them from a social or political setting [. . .] and inserts them into a decontextualized realm which emphasizes the aesthetic and stylistic” features (BORNSTEIN 2001, 14). In this respect, subsequent editions of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* that do not reproduce all the expressions of aesthetic principle Lawrence followed decontextualise the text to an extent. Equally, the illustrations, as many of them were produced specifically for the book (exceptions to this are to be found mainly among the portraits), can be considered as understandable fully only in the bibliographic environment of *The Seven Pillars*. The 1926 subscribers’ edition of this work, then, and any subsequent editions based on its text, can only be given a full and appropriate appreciation or analysis when considered in this form and as an independent aesthetic entity in which its narrative, layout, typography, bloomers, illustration and indeed its physicality are given their due weight.

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