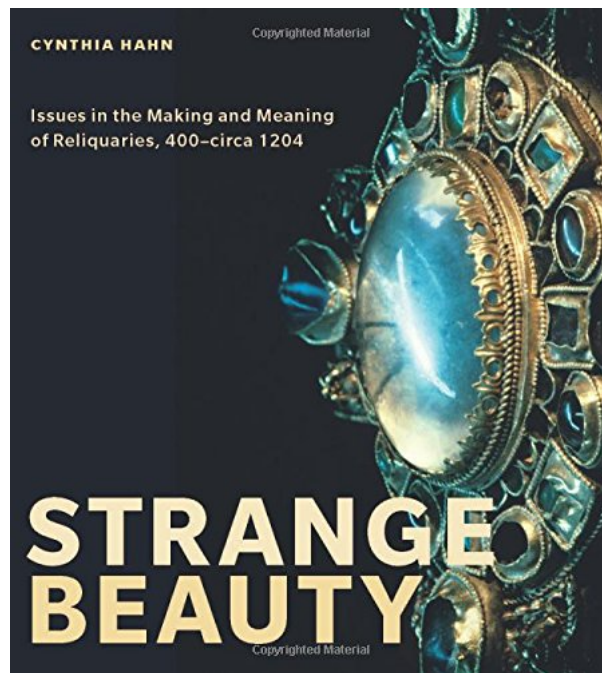
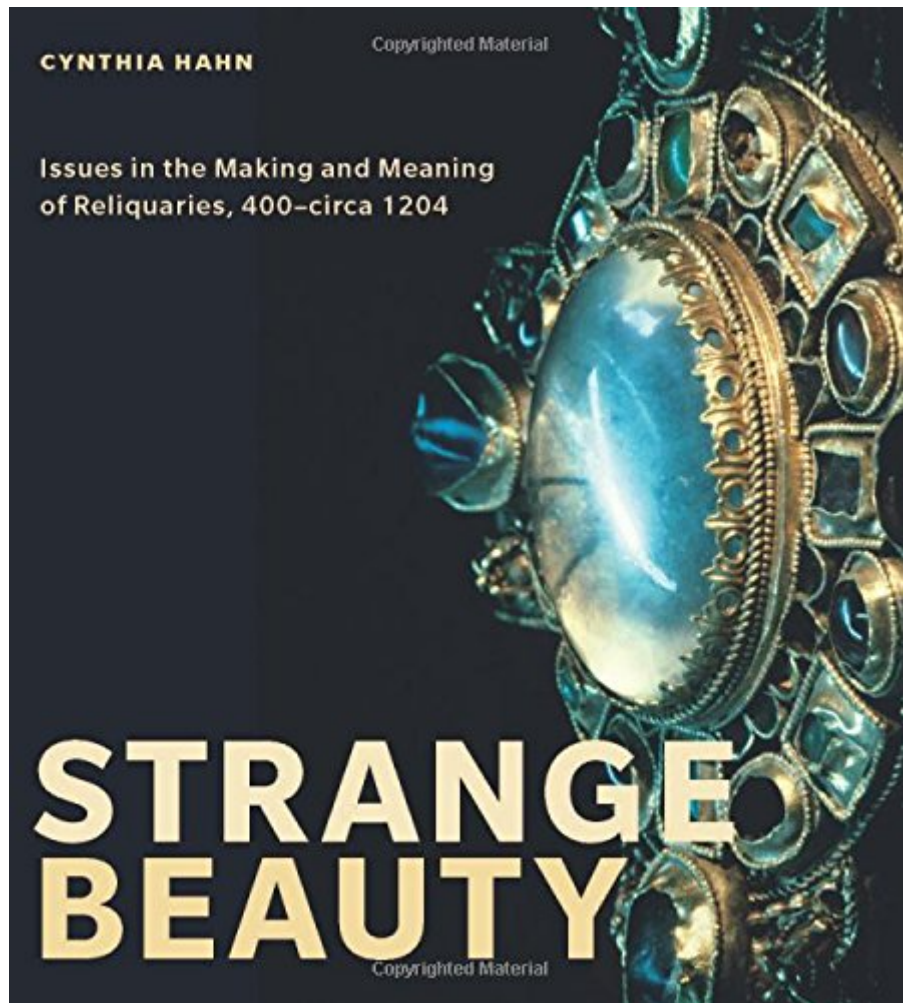


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“Cynthia Hahn offers a refreshing new synthesis on the topic of medieval reliquaries. She shows that they are a form of ‘representation’ that mediates religious experience of relics as well as their political and institutional meanings. Engaging both primary sources and current theoretical writings, Hahn’s text will be of crucial interest to a broader readership concerned with the material embodiment of the sacred and strategies of representation.”

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“Lavishly illustrated in color, this book will be of fundamental importance.”

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About the Author

Cynthia Hahn is Professor of Art History at Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center.

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Reliquaries, one of the central art forms of the Middle Ages, have recently been the object of much interest among historians and artists. Until now, however, they have had no treatment in English that considers their history, origins, and place within religious practice, or, above all, their beauty and aesthetic value. In *Strange Beauty*, Cynthia Hahn treats issues that cut across the class of medieval reliquaries as a whole. She is particularly concerned with portable reliquaries that often contained tiny relic fragments, which purportedly allowed saints to actively exercise power in the world.

Above all, Hahn argues, reliquaries are a form of representation. They rarely simply depict what they contain; rather, they prepare the viewer for the appropriate reception of their precious contents and establish the “story” of the relics. They are based on forms originating in the Bible, especially the cross and the Ark of the Covenant, but find ways to renew the vision of such forms. They engage the viewer in many ways that are perhaps best described as persuasive or “rhetorical,” and Hahn uses literary terminology—sign, metaphor, and simile—to discuss their operation. At the same time, they make use of unexpected shapes—the purse, the arm or foot, or disembodied heads—to create striking effects and emphatically suggest the presence of the saint.

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