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# Originality and Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament* of 1856

John Kresten Jespersen

*Two years ago (2006) was the 150th anniversary of the publication of The Grammar of Ornament by Owen Jones (1809–1874). This bible of ornament remains his best-known contribution to visual culture. This article looks at how the Grammar came about and also at its design intentions. The folio itself is really more famous for what it is than what it really is about. Jones' intention for ornamental designs of carpets, ceilings, wall elevations and fabrics was to create a field which was frequently conditioned by borders, panels or dados, cornices and covings. The field's ornaments consist of secondary motifs—dots, fragments, elements, etc.—but not primary or iconic, static, emblematic figures. With Jones, the field is a coloured field, and the secondary nature of the distributed ornaments aids in the creation of a coloured 'bloom'. The visual field is driven by Jones' new (and very old) aesthetic of repose. Repose conditions the field as an aesthetic with physiological, intellectual and spiritual results. It unifies the visual experience. The Grammar is indeed a grammar of ornament, making possible the creation of new and significant ornaments through the application of its 37 Propositions. The design theory of the Grammar is modern, scientific and devoid of deliberate historicism, operating by principles to create an ornament for every kind of decoration.*

**Keywords:** architectural theory—decorative arts reform—design history—design theory—field theory—ornament

Owen Jones (1809–74) was a Victorian architect of modest success in iron-and-glass construction. He was also a designer who was a household legend during his life. He is most famous for the *Grammar of Ornament* of 1856, a chromolithographed compendium of nineteen styles of historic and world ornament that includes a final, twentieth, chapter on nature. As an architect, designer and decorator,<sup>1</sup> Jones employed at times what was a radical ornament for his day. But the *Grammar* does not illustrate radical or revolutionary ornament; rather the illustrations are historical representations of real ornaments from architecture, textiles, tiles, rare books, metalwork, woodwork, needlework, wall painting, stained glass and the like. What is new to encyclopaedias of ornament is the colour of the 100 plates. What is revolutionary is the theory of ornament stated in the thirty-seven propositions of the 'general principles in the arrangement of form and colour, in architecture and the decorative

arts' that introduce the plates and twenty essays of the *Grammar*. Yet, even these radical ideas have precedents in Jones's actual work. And the least revolutionary parts of the *Grammar*—its ornaments and its essays—are still ground-breaking and of the highest quality. How did it come about?

## Background to the *Grammar*

In the spring of 1834, fresh from a tour of Greece and Egypt, Owen Jones and Jules Gourey arrived in Grenada from Egypt via Constantinople to make their historic study of the Alhambra palace. By 28 August of that year Jules Gourey was dead of cholera, but not before Jones and Gourey had made the 'most beautiful drawings of that palace I ever saw in my life', as his friend Frederick Catherwood said.<sup>2</sup> Jones not only drew the ornaments of the Alhambra to scale for his future publication but also made casts and impressions

with unsized paper so that he could maintain the accuracy of his research from site to press. At his death, Jones still had the lithographic stones (two hundred and eighty-eight), copper plates (thirty-one), zinc plates (twenty-three) and wood blocks (twenty-six) in his possession.<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Ferry has noted in her paper on Jones and his *Alhambra* that he had in his library Senefelder's quarto *History of Lithography* of 1819. While Senefelder pioneered the planographic process of lithography, beginning in 1796, it was Charles Joseph Hullmandel who pioneered the process of coloured lithography in England in about 1822.<sup>4</sup>

While he was completing the publication of the second volume of the *Alhambra*, Jones made the acquaintance of Henry Cole,<sup>5</sup> a civil servant reformer in the John Stuart Mill circle. Cole had been responsible for postal reform, and as 'Felix Summerly' wrote, beginning in 1841, handbooks on historic monuments that established his pseudonym as an authority on art-related matters. The tea set that he designed in 1846 won a prize from the Society of Arts. In 1848, Cole wrote three Reports to the Board of Trade about the School of Design. It was the Board of Trade's *Inquiry* in 1835 and 1836 that established the Normal School of Design at Somerset House in 1837. William Dyce, the Nazarene, became the director of the School in 1838 and edited his *Drawing-Book of the School of Design* in 1842–43, his last year as director.<sup>6</sup> Dyce was progressive in his theory, believing that student preparation for design required training different from the preparation of the painter. His Jacquard loom and potter's wheel formed the basis of his practical pedagogy while director, and he believed in an abstractive rather than an imitative approach to the discipline of drawing, as his *Drawing-Book* demonstrates.

Cole's approach as a civil servant was more concerned with the administration of the Schools, and more with the direction of the teaching than its content. Furthermore, sixteen Schools of Design were operating by 1849. Somerset House was part of a system of schools by the time Cole founded the *Journal of Design and Manufacture*, a short-lived serial issued every month and collected into a volume every six months from 1849–52. It was generally edited by Cole and by Richard Redgrave. The *Journal of Design* was Cole's mouthpiece in his attempts to reform the Schools of Design. The journal features short, anonymous contributions on criticism and theory, illustrated by real samples of fabric and wallpaper. His

inclusion of the manufacturer is a consequence of his being a civil servant involved with the Board of Trade, as the Normal School was set up by the Board to supply manufacturers with trained designers who could compete with French and German products in a world market. So Cole was at an interesting juncture where administration meets design, manufacture and economics when he was offered what Alf Bøe calls the 'secretaryship of the Schools of Design' by Lord Granville in the autumn of 1851.<sup>7</sup> Cole's campaign to reform British design, begun as Felix Summerly and involving the Society of Arts and the *Journal of Design and Manufacture*, succeeded in bringing the Schools under his control.

## The origin of the *Grammar*

His Society of Arts connection also led in 1851 to his involvement in the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph Paxton in 1850 and coloured by Owen Jones. Jones was in charge of the decoration and shared responsibility with M. D. Wyatt, the architect and Cole's protégé, for the exhibition arrangements. It was an exhibition of manufacture on a grand scale, with all the successes and failures of British design available for the public to see. The Crystal Palace was the first attempt at mass education with a limited focus: the elevation of public taste in design. The Crystal Palace secured Jones' reputation as a great colourist. We know that the *Grammar* began to take shape in Jones' mind later that year because by 16 February 1852 Cole noted in his diary that Jones had been to visit him with 'materials for the Grammar of Ornament'<sup>8</sup> Since Jones had already been consulting with Cole frequently on the arrangement of the exhibition spaces at the Crystal palace in late 1850 and early 1851, his consulting with Cole on the *Grammar* comes as no surprise. On Thursday, 5 February, Cole writes that 'O. Jones brought his paragraph on Patterns'. In fact, Cole recorded in his Diaries thirty-five meetings with Jones on the Crystal Palace and related matters before their historic meetings in February. The visual and the theoretical seem to have had separate but equal tracks in the preparation of the *Grammar*. The undated *Grammar of Ornament* at The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) must be from this time, begun about late 1851 or early 1852, and it was probably one of the items in question at the 16 February meeting between Jones and Cole. Besides a

title page, the only noteworthy visuals are a few water-colour ornaments in the Greek, Gothic painted, and Italian styles. Yet this preliminary take on the *Grammar* does list Jones' intentions to have plates on the following: 'Egyptian; Greek Carved; Greek Painted; Roman Carved; Roman Painted; Byzantine Carved; Byzantine Painted; Persian Painted; Arabian Carved; Arabian Painted; Moresque Carved; Moresque Painted; Gothic Carved; Gothic Painted; Gothic Written; Turkish Carved; Turkish Painted; Venetian; Italian Carved; Renaissance; Elizabethan; Chinese; Hindoo; Yucatan'.<sup>9</sup> In the 1856 edition, Jones eliminates the distinction between painted and carved, adds the sections on Savage Tribes (as John Leighton had done before him), Assyrian and Indian ornament, and excises Venetian and the planned chapter on the Yucatan. The latter change was probably the consequence of the death of his friend Frederick Catherwood, who drowned when the ship in which he was sailing, the *S.S. Arctic*, was rammed head-on by the French vessel the *Vesta* off the coast of Newfoundland on 27 September 1854.

Nonetheless, Jones had already broken the ground for his theory of the *Grammar*, and indeed he did owe Cole a debt for allowing him to publish his ideas in the *Journal of Design*, and for the lectures at the Society of Arts and at Marlborough House. For now, Jones was preoccupied with the Sydenham Crystal Palace and the *Grammar* was left to one side. While Hyde Park's Crystal Palace was arranged geographically with Cole's support, Jones arranged Sydenham's Crystal Palace art historically. The aim of the original Crystal Palace was practical. At Sydenham the aim was ideal. But most importantly, Sydenham brought Owen Jones another collaborator from the Cole circle, in Matthew Digby Wyatt, who was, like Jones, an architect and a scholar. In Wyatt's *The Crystal Palace and Park at Sydenham* (London, 1854), he writes that 'the great end and aim of the Crystal Palace are to cultivate the imaginative faculty in the workman himself'.<sup>10</sup> Wyatt's massive *Industrial Arts of the Nineteenth Century at the Great Exhibition* solved, because of the enormous scale of the project, printing problems for the *Grammar* several years later. Wyatt contributed two essays to the *Grammar* on the Renaissance and Italian styles of ornament, and was arguably the most important of Jones' collaborators. He was a scholar with an impressive history of publications and later became the first Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge

University. He was an expert in Renaissance and Italian art, and Jones was able to keep the quality of the contributions to the *Grammar* by Wyatt, J. B. Waring, J. O. Westwood, C. J. Richardson and his brother-in-law James Wild at the level of scholarship achieved by himself in his study of the Alhambra precisely because these men were known experts in their fields. Indeed, J. O. Westwood was also an expert in entomology like Michael Darby, the first scholar of Owen Jones. Except for Westwood, the collaborators, who also include T. T. Bury, were all architects like Jones.

As historian and as designer, Jones set out to write a history of ornament that was scientific in the contemporary sense of the word. Dr Samuel Johnson defined science in his *Dictionary* of 1787 as 'art based upon principles'. Jones looked to both history as visual evidence and to nature as source of principle in order to create a theory of ornament. 'To attempt to build up theories of art, or to form a style, independently of the past, would be an act of supreme folly', he writes in the Preface. 'It would be at once to reject the experiences and accumulated knowledge of thousands of years. On the contrary, we should regard as our inheritance all successful labors of the past, not blindly following them, but employing them simply as guides to find the true path'. But the essays are not impartial histories. Rather, they attempt to establish a rhetoric of infallibility for the history of ornament based on the underlying principles of nature found to exist in the designs of all the great styles of ornament. Gary Wihl brought this kind of rhetoric to my attention with his book, *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility* (Yale, 1985), but the idea of infallibility is also applicable to Jones' attempt to secure the history and theory of ornament in the science of nature. This intention he lays out in the Preface:

First. That whenever any style of ornament commands universal admiration, it will always be found to be in accordance with the laws which regulate the distribution of form in nature. Secondly, that however varied the manifestations in accordance with these laws, the leading ideas on which they are based are very few. Thirdly, that the modifications and developments which have taken place from one style to another have been caused by a sudden throwing off of some fixed trammel, which set thought free for a while, till the new idea, like the old, became again fixed, to give birth in its turn to fresh inventions. Lastly, I have endeavoured to show, in the twentieth chapter, that the future progress of Ornamental Art may be best secured by a return to Nature for fresh inspiration.

Nature and not history remains the touchstone of the *Grammar*, and nature is seen as the source of the principles for good design throughout the history of ornament. The logic of infallibility is at work here. All good design exhibits principles based on nature. These principles, framed as ‘Propositions’ in the *Grammar*, are few. The ornaments chosen by Jones and his team illustrate these principles. The illustrations chosen for the *Grammar* are selected from ‘a few of the most prominent types in certain styles closely connected with each other and in which certain general laws appeared to reign independently of the individual peculiarities of each’ (Preface, p. 1). It is in this context that the essays mediate between the 37 Propositions and the visual material, explaining further the infallibility of the propositions or principles in the light of the chromolithographs of individual ornaments.

### Concerning the plates of the *Grammar*

The chromolithographed ornaments, some in only two colours, but many with seven or eight colours, make up the 100 plates of the 1856 edition. There are also many black and white illustrations, some only diagrammatic, but some showing relief and a richness of value. Infrequently, there may be only one coloured illustration to the plate, sometimes as many as sixty. Even previously published sources had to be redrawn, and all the preparatory drawings were executed by Jones’ pupils, Mr Albert Warren and Mr Charles Aubert, as he calls them in the Preface, who with Mr Stubbs executed the 100 sample plates now in the Prints and Drawings Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum. These preliminary gouache designs served as the models for Francis Bedford, who was responsible for turning these plates into the final drawings on lithographic stone. Bedford had the help of H. Fielding, W. R. Tymms, A. Warren and S. Sedgfield, who executed the drawings on hundreds of stones in less than a year, as Jones tells us. Day and Son, the printers, also completed the printing in record time, the Preface being dated 15 December 1856. Several features stand out in the preparatory plates and in the first two editions of the *Grammar*, the folio of 1856 and the reduced quarto with 112 plates of 1864: all the lines are ruled by straight edge and compass; and all the registrations are nearly perfect. It is truly an architect’s book. In

keeping with the theory of the reformers around Henry Cole, all the ornaments are presented as flat and ‘fit’ the page. The plates are snippets of ornament and consist of the ornament itself abstracted from its decorative context. Jones’ illustrations are not generally seen in context or in situ as in A. Raguene’s *Matériaux et documents d’architecture classés par ordre alphabétique* (Paris, H. Cagnon, 1872), but are isolated on the page within some form of organizing grid. Sometimes, as in the case of Salzenberg’s 1854 publication<sup>11</sup> on early Christian wall painting of Constantinople or Hessemer’s 1842 publication<sup>12</sup> on Arabic and Old Italian decoration, the recasting of the previously published ornament in the *Grammar* suffers. The originals are better. But this is usually not the case. Sometimes the chromolithographs for an historical style have never been published before, as in the Ornament of Savage Tribes, the Arabic, Persian, Indian, Hindu, Turkish and Chinese chapters and the chapter on Nature, a full forty per cent of the material. Conversely, as in the Byzantine section, the visual material is heavily indebted to fourteen separate publications; the section on Assyrian and Persian ornament relies on Layard for Assyrian and on Flandrin and Coste for early Persian. But Moorish ornament is indebted to only one publication, his own, and these ornaments are all redrawn. Thus, very nearly half the *Grammar* is Jones’ ‘original’ ornament drawn from museums and first-hand observation, and not indebted to prior publication. As such, the *Grammar* is an original work in the main, not simply for its analytic approach to ornament, nor only for its colour, but in precedent of illustration and comprehensive treatment of ornament outside the western European tradition. And unlike John Leighton’s *Suggestions in Design* of 1853, which so nearly anticipated Jones’ masterpiece, every ornament illustrated in the *Grammar* is credited with a source. The visual scholarship, in other words, is impeccable and catholic.

The following year, 1857, Jones was honoured by RIBA with a ‘Royal Gold Medal, the gift of her Majesty the Queen, to architecture’.<sup>13</sup> The president of the Institute, the Earl de Grey, while acknowledging the near ‘act of nonsense’ that any justification of the award would make, did cite two important types of works as grounds for the medal: first, Jones’ publications ‘of immense value’ and of ‘great service to his profession’<sup>14</sup> that had been more productive for the

publisher than for the author; and secondly, the accessibility to all, in a way the publications had not been, of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham where his 'genius' was 'manifestly displayed'. Michael Darby notes that the same year 'on 22 July 1857 he was awarded the Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazare by the King of the Italians, and on the 23 September in the same year he received the Order of King Leopold of the Belgians'.<sup>15</sup> His old French friend Prosper Mérimée also recommended him for the Legion of Honor, but, according to Michael Darby, politics prevented this award.<sup>16</sup> It is hard not to imagine that the European awards were for the *Grammar of Ornament*.

Even before the *Grammar* was published as an imperial folio at the end of 1856, specimen plates were placed on view in the Stationery Court of the Crystal Palace, Sydenham and taken note of there by the *Art-Journal*. In a review of 'The Publications of Messrs. Day and Son' in late 1856, the journal observes that there was a change in plans for the printing of the *Grammar* that caused a 'little delay'. The reason for the delay was that the *Grammar* was first intended to be printed with 500 stones, 'at an average of five printings to each stone'. But 'it was subsequently deemed advisable to use seven hundred stones, or seven to each plate, in order to produce the work in an entirely satisfactory manner'.<sup>17</sup> This *Art-Journal* article is also the source of the error that the *Grammar* 'will contain three thousand examples of Ornamental Decoration'.<sup>18</sup> This was to be hoped for before the publication, but the actual tally is about 2350 ornaments in full chromolithography. Another significant review appeared much later, after the second edition in quarto, also by Day and Son in 1864. This edition, priced at five guineas, or one quarter the price of the imperial folio, added twelve plates to the 100, but nothing is new, and the old Preface is there with its date of 1856 to confuse some cataloguers of this edition.

### The critical reception of the *Grammar*

The reviewer was George Eliot the novelist, whose husband G. H. Lewes, the philosopher, was a close friend of Jones. As Flores makes clear, the review is basically about Owen Jones as interior decorator: 'all honor, then, to the architect who zealously vindicated the claim of internal ornamentation to be a part of the architect's function, and has laboured to rescue that form of art which is most closely connected with the

sanctities and pleasures of our hearths from the hands of uncultured tradesmen'.<sup>19</sup> Jones decorated the Priory at North Banks, which Lewes and Eliot bought for 2000 pounds on a forty-nine year lease on 21 August 1863. By 1 November 1863, Owen Jones had entirely redecorated the drawing room and the dining room and, at great expense to the owners, had caused them to buy new furniture for these rooms. The papers were one-of-a-kind. I have a different story to Flores on how the paper in the drawing room was spoiled. Lewes relates in his Journal that 'the terrier [Ben] was sick over our elegant drawing room paper which Owen Jones had decorated, and over the carpet! This obliges us to have fresh paper made, as there are no remnants of the old, and it was originally made for us'.<sup>20</sup> By the time of Eliot's review in 1865, Jones had come into his own as an interior decorator. He was also to make alterations to the Priory in 1871 and redecorate again then, I suspect.<sup>21</sup> The second quarto edition, which Eliot reviewed, ran to three printings: 1864, 1865 and 1868.<sup>22</sup>

### Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship

The ten editions from 1972 on have given rise to new scholarship on and about Owen Jones and the *Grammar*, but even in Jones' lifetime his work had a wide-ranging and significant impact on scholarship. The *Grammar* was translated into French with the second edition by Day and Son; and, the third edition by Quaritch saw its translation into German. It made a deep impression on Albert Charles Auguste Racinet who brought out his *L'Ornement Polychrome* in 1869, a visually superior publication thanks to the advances made in chromolithography in the intervening thirteen years. The format of Racinet's folio is similar, but as Stuart Durant has observed in his *Ornament*, the material is not. Durant also cites H. Dolmetsch's *Ornamentenschaz* of 1889 as an encyclopaedia of ornament inspired by the *Grammar*, and cites the 'last true descendant' of the *Grammar* as H. Bossert's *Das Ornamentwerk* of 1924. The Bossert, Durant tells us, featured 'primitive and peasant-European work'.<sup>23</sup> Alexander Speltz's *Das Farbige Ornament aller Historischen Stile* published in Leipzig in 1915 may also be included in the genealogy of the *Grammar*.

Aside from imitation, only Lewis F. Day in London and Alois Riegl in Vienna understood as scholars

the impact of the *Grammar*. By 1887, when Day wrote his ‘Victorian Progress in Applied Design’, Jones’ propositions were no longer considered ‘principles’ at all. ‘His *Grammar of Ornament* marks a point, and a turning-point, in the history of English ornament. The “principles” he enunciated were not such as one can endorse en masse, at this date—they were many of them not principles at all; the title is too pompous and pretentious altogether. It would be much nearer the mark (however irreverent) to call them “tips”; and as such they were of immense value to manufacturers, decorators, and designers, who were floundering ...’<sup>24</sup> Day observes the ‘sobriety of taste’ that Jones helped to bring about by his example in the exhibitions succeeding the Crystal Palace. Day continues: ‘it was as a theorist rather than as an artist that he made his mark on the first years of the latter half of this century’.<sup>25</sup> What is striking about Day’s observation on Jones is this: ‘Owen Jones was not, if the truth must be told, the great colourist he was reputed to be. He had mastered the theory of Alhambresque colour combination, but he was never safe with a flat tint, where theory was of less avail’.<sup>26</sup> But Jones had long left the theory of the primaries expounded in his work of the 1850s and developed, as the surviving designs from the 1860s and 1870s at the Victoria and Albert Museum prove, a very complex and sophisticated colour sensibility that does justify his reputation. These designs must have already been lost to the public eye by 1887 when Day made his assessment. Even so, Day says that Jones’ influence as a theorist was ‘immense’, and the *Grammar*, the most significant publication in Jones’ *oeuvre* that brings together both visual evidence, theory and scholarship, must be the reason for Day’s judgement.

Alois Riegl was a complex art historian concerned with the development and transformation of art into ornament, and within ornament, the evolution of forms from one style to another. At a fundamental level of influence, Owen Jones’ emphasis on the psychological perception of ornament and on the formal theory that explains it is absorbed by Riegl and continued into art historical scholarship of the twentieth century. Two specific examples of Jones’ influence on Riegl’s *Stilfragen* of 1893 indicate how the *Grammar* was put to use in a practical sense by the art historian. As a visual document, the *Grammar* was culled by Riegl for examples of unusual development in ornament types. Looking at an Apulian red-figured



Fig 1. Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 1856, Greek Ornament, plate XIX, no. 7 (Dover edition, 1987).

vase ornament in his discussion of two-dimensional palmette tendrils, Riegl illustrates Jones’ Greek ornament plate XIX, no. 7 from the *Grammar* as his Figure 125.<sup>27</sup> This critical ornament gives Riegl a chance to discuss the relationship of Attic vase painting to Hellenistic art, going so far afield in his discussion in the following paragraph to include Pompeian interior decoration. This formalist analysis pursues the consequences of the branching tendrils in this illustration [1]. Of course it is the liberation of the tendril that starts the development of the arabesque. This fact is critical to Riegl’s formalist theory of ornament. The illustration is therefore a crucial choice. Nonetheless, Riegl not only culled the *Grammar* for visual examples of his theory, he read the essays. He picked up on Jones’ theory of the conventionalization of nature in ornament (especially Propositions 8 and 13 in the *Grammar*) and made of it an ‘antinaturalistic law governing the combination of flowers and tendrils’.<sup>28</sup> When Riegl treads on thin ice claiming that the Sassanians independently invented a vegetal tendril, he quotes Jones as an authority, making precisely the

same observation: ‘the ornaments [from Tak I Bostan] are all constructed on the same principle as Roman ornaments, though the modeled surfaces are treated more like the variations found on the Byzantine ornaments which they strikingly resemble’.<sup>29</sup> Jones goes on to say that Sassanian capitals at Bi Sutoun ‘contain the germs of all the ornamentation of the Arabs and Moors. It is the earliest example we meet with of lozenge-shaped diapers’.<sup>30</sup> Jones’ appeal to Riegl was that of a formalist concerned with the evolution and development of ornaments from one style to the next, and while Riegl made the most of this, it is Jones who was his precursor and support.

Jones’ influence on artists, designers and architects through the *Grammar* was much more pervasive than his influence on scholarship. His influence on the two most prominent designers in England until the turn of the twentieth century, Dr Christopher Dresser and William Morris, is well known, as is his general influence on Art Nouveau. The significance of the *Grammar* for European and American architects practising ornament in the twentieth century has been documented by Ellen A. Christensen,<sup>31</sup> and more recently Flores has addressed the issue of ‘legacy’, which includes the influences of Jones on Viollet-le-Duc, Le Corbusier and Wright. The Supervising Architects of the Treasury in Washington, DC also had more than one well-thumbed copy of the *Grammar*, and it was put to good use at the federal level. Alfred B. Mullett’s War, State and Navy building, 1871–88, contains an elaborate Moorish library by Richard von Ezdorf straight from the pages of the *Grammar of Ornament*. It is an exquisite space, but not generally known to architectural historians. Examples could multiply; the significance would not be less.

During the hiatus when architects abandoned ornament (and even now only a few have reacquired the art) the *Grammar* had no edition published, and at some hallowed institutions books on ornament were even removed from library shelves. Then, in 1974, Michael Darby contributed a major, if unpublished, dissertation on Owen Jones, a landmark of patience, intelligence and study. Darby’s scholarship is significant on at least two counts: first, he established the ‘Eastern ideal’ and the Islamic style as one of the revivals of the Victorian period, on a par with the Gothic and Classical revivals, if not as popular or prolific. Secondly, his dissertation attempted to give the reader the full scope of the achievement of this architect–antiquarian, this scholar–

ornamentor and this archaeologist–publisher. Yet, even though Darby was at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the years of his and my dissertations, he never really assessed what is a brilliant and stunning collection of original designs by Jones.

## Recent scholarship on the *Grammar*

Three scholars, besides Carol Flores, have contributed much to our recent understanding of Jones’ masterpiece. The first and most important of these is John Grant Rhodes, whose dissertation ‘Ornament and Ideology: A Study in mid-nineteenth-century British Design Theory’<sup>32</sup> was written at Harvard University in 1983. This study is in effect a focus on the first half of Alf Bøe’s 1954 thesis at Oxford University, *From Gothic Revival to Functional Form*, published in Oslo in 1957. Rhodes deals with Parliamentary Reports by the Board of Trade from 1836 on, A. W. N. Pugin, the Reform



Fig 2. Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 1856, Leaves from Nature, plate XCI (Dover edition, 1987).



Group around Henry Cole, and, of course, the *Grammar of Ornament*. The focus is on ideology, of which he disapproves. The analysis is brilliant and compelling, but the illustrations are few and indistinct. Rhodes' study of the *Journal of Design and Manufacture* is the most thorough and informative to date, and there is a copy in the Baker Library at Harvard University that would have facilitated his research. The study of the *Grammar*, focusing on the Propositions, is very well done. But Rhodes is not sympathetic to the design issues facing Jones, and had no awareness of Jones' original ornament in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

No author has done more to place Jones in his proper intellectual context than Debra Schafer in her *The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style: Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture*<sup>33</sup> published in 2003. A comparison of John Ruskin, Owen Jones, Gottfried Semper and Alois Riegl places Jones in the intellectual company he deserves, in the most rigorous of terms. In her essay on Jones, Schafer sets out to dispel the notion that the *Grammar* is an 'artistic sourcebook' but rather is a text that attempts at 'pioneering a new style of architecture'<sup>34</sup> in the mind of the reader. Schafer sees the *Grammar* as summing up the reforms of Dyce and Cole, and I might add, Pugin, and classifying ornament according to style. Classification of ornament in the *Grammar* was done, says Schafer, both according to systematic botany (the study of kinds and relationships) and according to structural botany (the study according to structure and parts).<sup>35</sup> Jones' analysis of the chestnut leaf [2]:

As in the chestnut leaf, Plate XCI, the area of each lobe diminishes in equal proportion as it approaches the stem, so in any combination of leaves each leaf is everywhere in harmony with the group; as in one leaf the areas are so perfectly distributed that the repose of the eye is maintained, it is equally so in the group; we never find a disproportionate leaf interfering to destroy the repose of the group<sup>36</sup>

is evidence for Schafer that he also knew the botanical system of Carlus Linnaeus. The same binomial system of naming plants, she says, is evident in Jones' 'analysis of the nineteen styles of historic ornament'.<sup>37</sup> Schafer continues: 'His emphasis on formal laws of surface decoration also implied a coherent organization of ornamental types that Jones defined along cultural lines, grouping styles of ornament according to cultural resemblance and shared formal principles'.<sup>38</sup> Jones' presentation of ornament as having a

will of its own and an independence from 'representational and expressive values' brought ornament into line with botany in that both had their own 'laws of transformation'.<sup>39</sup> The formal conception of ornament allows it to serve architecture more effectively, Schafer contends. In her chapter on 'The Language of Ornament', it is the conventionalizing formal theory of Jones that brings it into line with Condillac's *General Grammar*: 'the linearity essential to verbal or written language had its parallel in the geometric structure of ornamental compositions'.<sup>40</sup> Conventionalization was universal for Jones (and for Condillac) and had global significance. Unfortunately, Schafer sees the *Grammar*, as John Summerson does, more as 'a polygot phrase book'.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, I think that the *Grammar* is a convincing grammar of those formal elements that make up the language of ornament. As I observed in 1989 in an essay on the *Grammar*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is to the point when he writes about the art of writing that 'first, there is mere gesticulation; then rosaries or wampum; then picture-language; then hieroglyphics; then alphabetic letters. These all consist of a translation of man into nature, of a substitution of the visible for the audible'.<sup>42</sup> Ornament is picture language according to this aesthetic theory and it is possible therefore, as Jones has done, to express a grammar of that language. Loosely speaking, grammar comprises the rules that control the structure and functions of the component forms. Compare Coleridge's claim for 'picture-language' with René Smeets' observation that 'ornamentation is a language of signs, which come from the deeper regions of human nature where mimicry, gesture, song, and dance originate'.<sup>43</sup> Jones has articulated the grammar of ornament in his thirty-seven propositions, and chosen examples of ornament from the leading styles that exemplify those propositions, and as we shall see, made good the claim that a new style of ornament can be developed from these propositions.

Nicholas Frankel's 'The Ecstasy of Decoration: The Grammar of Ornament as Embodied Experience'<sup>44</sup> is a recent study that deeply appreciates Rhodes' contributions to the debate, and the contributions to colour that Jones makes. It is also to his credit that he relates to the *Grammar* as a rare book, and consults the rare book historians, Ruari McLean and Joan M. Friedman. It is Friedman who calls it 'one of the greatest monuments of color printing in the nineteenth century'.<sup>45</sup> Frankel's brilliant essay is flawed, however, by his

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Fig 3. Owen Jones, Carpet Design for Templeton and Co., c.1870 (E.33-1945, Prints and Drawings Department: V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

being unable to distinguish between ornament and decoration, an issue I admit more crucial to architectural school and art history than to the interdisciplinary world of literature and books in which Frankel moves. The *Grammar* is visually about ornament, about the irreducible element that is a gestalt whole. Decoration is the distribution of that element over a carpet, a wall, a dado, a frieze, a dress, or a cup and is 'super-added to utility' in Dr Christopher Dresser's 1862 definition.<sup>46</sup> The *Grammar* is a compendium of those single, if complex, events that are intended to be distributed (or decorated) in a certain way (the grammar of the distribution). The ornaments themselves are also created in a certain way (the grammar) before their distribution as decoration in the field. Jones intended a 'perfect proportional distribution of the areas ... [and] the even distribution of the surface decoration'<sup>47</sup> as evidenced by the chestnut leaves of Plate XCI. In my 1984 dissertation on the *Grammar*, I called this field theory. The field usually requires containment by borders, and mixed in with the ornaments of the field in the *Grammar* are ornaments for the border.

An example of Owen Jones' original ornament provides a model for the field theory of the *Grammar* and an example of his grammar at work. One carpet design shows that the ornaments are elemental motif-oriented fragments of the larger composition [3].

Essential to the composition is Proposition 8, which states 'All ornament should be based upon a geometrical construction'. This proposition is not to be found in the lectures at Marlborough House that anticipate the Propositions of the 1856 folio and is unique to the *Grammar*. The field is a geometrical matrix first of all, given life and bloom by colour. The geometry reduces traditional ornament to a series of dots and fragments, which assume a secondary position to the expanse of the field. The field is made by, and contained by, the complementary borders that surround it. The same notational system of dots extends into the border. This sensationist and radical approach to ornament is a revolutionary departure into abstraction, away from ornament that has meaning in the traditional sense and toward an ornament that creates mood, feeling and repose. As Bruce Masheck in his Arts article on 'The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness'<sup>48</sup> has indicated, this kind of design by Jones is the forerunner of modern abstract painting. As such, it has no content, no subject and no historicity: it is flat, conventional, abstract and sensationist in the manner of Alexander Bain's contemporary psychology,<sup>49</sup> which replaced the older associationist psychology of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

## Conclusion: influence, aesthetics and originality

It may be a rare book, it may be one of the world's most beautiful books, but the *Grammar* is also an original work of art. Consequently, its influence on architects, designers and artists has been greater than its influence on scholars. For a century, almost every architect's office had a copy of the *Grammar*. It has been a reference book for art professionals more so than for librarians. Even while formalism held sway in art history, the *Grammar* stood at the source of that movement via Riegl. The influence of the *Grammar* on scholarship was not negligible, therefore, adding weight to the theory that dominated art and architectural history in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the practical influence on William Morris, Dr Christopher Dresser, Art Nouveau, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier was greater and more profound because the *Grammar* is a repository of ornaments, a source book for myriad design problems. Its ultimate purpose is the practical decoration of objects of utility.

But what of the aesthetic of the decorated object? Propositions 3 and 4 of the *Grammar* state that: 'As Architecture, so all works of the Decorative Arts, should possess fitness, proportion, harmony, the result of all which is repose' [and] 'True beauty results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections, are satisfied from the absence of any want'. In Jones' system of motif and field, the motif is secondary to the field it decorates. It is no longer a primary element, a figure or a representation, but an abstraction, a fragment or a sensation. The end result for the viewer is repose, a spiritual rather than a moral elevation. And repose is a mental feeling, an emotional condition brought about by the satisfaction of both feeling and intellect, by both the aesthetic conditions of proportion and harmony, and by the moral condition of fitness. Instead of preaching at the viewer, as did the High Victorian Gothic visual system, Jones elevates the spiritual condition of the viewer by feelings of tranquillity, serenity, grace or, in short, repose. Jones' ornament is the result of a melding of science and culture, a vastly expanded science that includes botany, optics, mathematics, psychology, physiology, physics and a global culture inclusive of the oriental and the primitive. His original carpet design shows this condition of repose. It proves that the rules for the creation of ornament found in the 37 propositions are a valid grammar of ornament, employed by Jones at the end of his career to create new designs from old examples.

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## Notes

1 Jones was well known in his day for the Moorish style of ornament that he pioneered with his publication of the *Alhambra* from 1836 to 1845. As a result of these catholic tendencies, he is responsible for both an eclectic and an original Victorian style of ornament. His designs graced playing cards and stamps by De La Rue, biscuit tins printed by Benjamin George George for Huntley Palmer, wallpaper by John Trumble and Sons, Jeffrey and Co., Townsend, Parker and Co., and even Sanderson, textiles by Benjamin Warner, carpets by James Templeton and Co. and by Brinton, and furniture by Jackson and Graham. It

was as a decorator that Owen Jones achieved contemporary fame: as the decorator for Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace of 1851 (removed to Sydenham in 1853); as the decorator of the Gezira palace in Cairo in 1864, designed by the German architect Julius Franz, known later as Franz-Bey, for Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt; as the decorator for Mr Arthur Morrison's sumptuous 16, Carleton House Terrace, London in 1867–68, and for James Mason's alteration at Eynsham Hall, 1872–74. See *The Builder*, vol. 32, 9 May 1874, pp. 383–5; M. Darby, *Grove Art Online*, available on <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/fine-arts/owenjones.html>, accessed 4 March 2006; biographical note in Victorian Web, available on <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/design/jones/jonesov.html>, accessed 4 March 2008; K. Richardson, 'British Biscuit Tins', *Antiques & Collecting Magazine*, vol. 99, December 1994, pp. 38–40+.

2 Quoted in K. Ferry, 'Printing the Alhambra: Owen Jones and Chromolithography', *Architectural History*, vol. 46, 2003, pp. 175–6. The letter is described by Ms Ferry as by Catherwood to Robert Hay, 15 February 1835 in the British Library, Add. MS 38094, pp. 75–6.

3 These were sold by Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge on 10 April 1875 as part of lot number 167.

4 Ferry, p. 177. For a succinct overview of the chromolithographic process, see D. Pankow, 'Chromolithography', in *The Grammar of Ornament*, CD-ROM, Octavo edn., 1997, pp. 7–9. Jones is among a few lithographers in England and on the continent struggling with inks and chromolithographic registration during the 1830s. Ferry quotes a letter from Jones to Joseph Bonomi indicating that Jones visits the chemist Chevreul and the writer Prosper Merimée in Paris in 1836 to seek help with printing colour on zinc plates. Jones gains first-hand experience with the chromolithographic process during his publication of the *Alhambra* from 1836 to 1842 (volume I) and again from 1842 to 1845 (volume II).

5 H. Cole, *Diaries*, National Library, entry Tuesday, 19 March 1844: 'Called on Owen Jones'.

6 A. Bøe, *From Gothic Revival to Functional Form: A Study in Victorian Theories of Design*, Oslo University Press, Oslo, 1957, pp. 43–7.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

8 Cole, *op. cit.*, entry Monday, 16 February 1852.

9 O. Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, sketchbook, Royal Institute of British Architects Library, 'List of Plates'.

10 M. D. Wyatt, *Views of the Crystal Palace and Park, Sydenham*, Day and Son, London, 1854, p. 10.

11 W. Salzenberg, *Alt Christliche Baudenkmale von Constantinopel*, Ernst & Korn, Berlin, 1854.

12 J. M. Hessemer, *Arabische und Alt-Italienische Bau-Verzierungen*, Deitrich Reimer, Berlin, 1842.

13 *The Builder*, vol. 32, 9 May 1874, p. 384.

14 *Ibid.*

15 M. Darby, 'Introduction', unpublished in my possession, 1989, p. 40.

16 M. Darby, 'Owen Jones and the Eastern Ideal' Ph.D. dissertation, University of Reading, 1974, p. 363. See C. Flores n 123, ch. 2, p. 260.

17 Anonymous, 'The Publications of Messrs. Day and Son', *The Art-Journal*, 1 Oct, 1856, XXII p. 320. Each stone carried a different colour of ink, with an average of seven colours per plate.

18 *Ibid.*

- 19 G. Eliot, 'Review of the *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones', *Fortnightly Review* (15 May 1865) quoted by Flores, *Owen Jones*, n 124, p. 260. For easier access to the whole review, see *Everyone and Everything in George Eliot*, vol. 2, compiled and edited by G. Newlin, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, pp. 220–2.
- 20 G. H. Lewes, *Journals and Diaries*, Beinicke Rare Book Library, Yale University, MS VAULT, Eliot, Series VI, Folder 1–9, entries dated Saturday, 21 August 1863; Saturday, 1 November 1863 and Thursday, 13 November 1863. On Tuesday, 24 November, there was a house warming attended by Antony Trollope and Owen Jones amongst others. There are 77 references to Owen Jones in the Lewes diaries from 1860 to 1874. Jones knew Lewes much earlier and collaborated with him in *An Apology for the Colouring of the Greek Court*, Bradbury & Evans, London, 1854. See Flores, p. 189 for her version of the story.
- 21 Lewes, op. cit., Friday, 17 March 1871; Friday, 24 March 1871; Thursday, 6 April 1871 and Tuesday, 25 April 1871: 'Owen Jones came to discuss final arrangements about alterations of the house'.
- 22 In 1868, the bookseller Bernard Quaritch bought the lithographic stones from Day and Son and began a degraded set of editions in 1868 that brought about an investigation by the US Treasury's Secret Service of a possibly pirated American edition of 1880 by J. W. Boulton of New York. This third edition abandoned Jones' and Bedford's compass and rule and substituted freehand drawing of the ornaments. This caused a decline in quality in both the chromolithographic and the engraved plates which, together with sloppy registration, created in some plates whole new 'reinterpretations' of the original ornaments. There was a fourth edition from 1876 to 1880, a sixth edition (counting the American as a fifth edition) in 1910, a seventh edition in 1928, the latter two possibly variants of the fourth edition, which received new title pages in order to be bound. In 1972, Van Nostrand Reinhold brought out an eighth edition which seems to have been a photoreproduction of the fourth edition by B. Quaritch with a new title page. In 1982, there was another edition by Van Nostrand, followed in 1986 by an edition by Portland House maintaining the same bad reprint by Quaritch. In 1987, Dover brought out an edition that reproduced at last the plates from the 1856 edition in reduced quarto size but eliminated the essays. From 1868 to 1987 over a period of 119 years, publishers brought out at least thirteen editions of Jones' masterpiece, including a microfilm by Research Publications and a film strip by Sheikh Publications in 1972. There have been three noteworthy editions of the *Grammar* in the 1990s. The first was a complete departure from the book format. It was a CD-ROM by Direct Imagination based on the 1856 folio with an Introduction by a new generation of Jones scholars, Carol Flores, Ellen Christensen and John Kresten Jespersen. This was followed by a Parkgate edition with an Introduction by Michael Snowdin, published by Barnes and Noble, and based on a 1910 fifth edition by B. Quaritch. In 1998, there was another CD-ROM by Octavo with an 'Introduction' by the learned Ruari McLean and an essay on 'Chromolithography' by D. Pankow, based, like Direct Imagination's CD-ROM, on the 1856 first edition. More editions have followed in the twenty-first century.
- 23 S. Durant, *Ornament*, Overlook Press, Woodstock, New York, 1986, p. 15. This is an excellent history of books on design, and places the origin of the *Grammar* with the Crystal Palace Company. Durant describes the *Grammar* as the earliest analytical study of ornament (p. 14).
- 24 L. F. Day, 'Victorian Progress in Applied Design', *Art-Journal*, vol. 49, 1887, p. 187.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 A. Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Translated by E. Kain, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, pp. 214–15.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 264.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 264–66, n 47a from Jones, op. cit., 'Assyrian and Persian Ornament', p. 30.
- 30 Jones, op. cit., p. 30.
- 31 E. A. Christensen, 'The Significance of Owen Jones's *The Grammar of Ornament* for the Development of Architectural Ornament in Twentieth-Century Europe and America', M.A. thesis, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1986.
- 32 J. G. Rhodes, 'Ornament and Ideology: A Study in Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Design Theory', Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 1983.
- 33 D. Schaffer, *The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style: Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, especially pp. 22–32 for Jones.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 26
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 27; quoted from Jones, op. cit., p. 157.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, Schaffer's footnote here credits M. D. Wyatt's division of Renaissance ornament into Lombardi, Roman, Venetian and Genoese, p. 116; however, Jones' major separation of Islamic ornament into Turkish, Arabic, Moorish, Persian and Indian also follows this scientific grouping.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 41 J. Summerson, 'What Is Ornament and What Is Not', *Via*, 3, 1977, p. 6; quoted by Schaffer, p. 73, n 73. See also Thomas H. Beeby, 'The Grammar of Ornament/Ornament as Grammar' in same issue, pp. [10]–29.
- 42 *Coleridge: Poetry and Prose*, ed. with introduction by C. Baker, Bantam Books, New York, 1965, p. 200.
- 43 R. Smeets, *Signs, Symbols and Ornaments*, translated by A. Hutchinson from the 1973 Dutch, ed., V. N. Reinhold, New York, 1975, p. 73.
- 44 N. Frankel, 'The Ecstasy of Decoration: *The Grammar of Ornament as Embodied Experience*', *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, Winter, 2003, pp. 1–32, available on [http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/winter\\_03/articles/fran\\_print.html](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/winter_03/articles/fran_print.html), accessed 9 March, 2008.
- 45 J. M. Friedman, *Color Printing in England 1486–1870*, an exhibition, 20 April to 25 June 1978, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 1978, p. 53; also quoted by Frankel, p. 11.
- 46 C. Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design*, American Life Foundation, Watkins Glen, 1977, p. 1. For an architectural definition of ornament, beginning with the Greek *kosmos*, see K. Bloomer, *The Nature of Ornament: Rhythm and Metamorphosis in Architecture*, Norton, New York, 2000, pp. 15–27.
- 47 Jones, op. cit., p. 157.
- 48 B. Masheck, 'The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness', *Arts*, vol. 51, September, 1976, pp. 82–109.
- 49 A. Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect*, Parker, London, 1855, esp. p. 240.