

Seen through the Visions
of Young and Old Germans

William Blake's *The Ancient Britons*: A Book
and a Website (Now Vanished) Reviewed

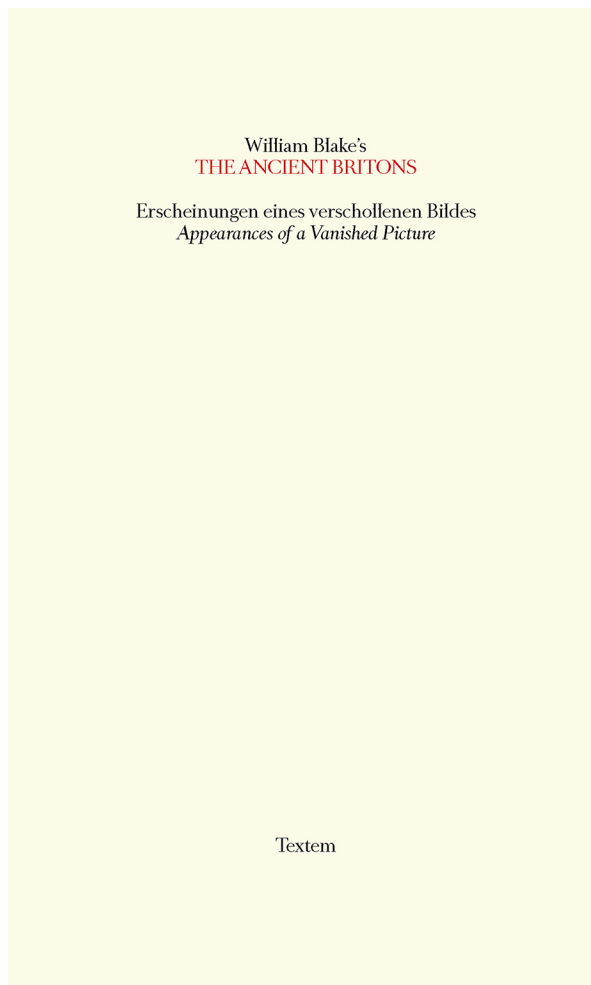
Arbeitsgruppe Ancient Britons/Ancient Britons
Team: Clemens Baiker, Hendrik Fleck, Dimitra
Gatsiou, Dana Kast, Mizi Lee, Janosch Mueller,
Theresa Mueller, Julius Naegele, Alexander
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1 WHILE Robert Southey thought that *The Ancient
Britons* was a massive disappointment ("one of his
worst pictures"),¹ for Seymour Stocker Kirkup, Blake's fame

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale Universi-
ty Press, 2004) [hereafter *BR(2)*] 300.



rested entirely on this painting (14 x 10 feet). Reported as
lost not long after the exhibition of 1809, it may have been
accidentally destroyed. For Kirkup, however, the picture
persisted through memory: "It made so great an impres-
sion on me that I made a drawing of it fifty years after-
wards" (*BR*[2] 294). The sketch demonstrated the "idea of
the composition of the Heroes of Camlan" (*BR*[2] 289)—
that is, the three survivors of Arthur's last battle, famous
for its bloodshed. These heroes were Welsh warriors, de-
scribed by Blake as the "most Beautiful," "most Strong,"
and "most Ugly" in *A Descriptive Catalogue* (E 542). They
fought alongside Arthur until the bitter end. The battle,
which is legendary, as relevant historical facts have been
difficult to ascertain, played an important role in the for-
mation of the British nation. Kirkup passed his sketch on
to Algernon Charles Swinburne, who was working on *Wil-
liam Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868).² Utterly convinced of

2. In 1866, when writing to Swinburne, Kirkup said: "I thought it his
master-piece as an Academic work—I was then a student ... I now
think it too Greek—I would have avoided the Hercules & Apollo at

the accuracy of his reconstruction, he told William Michael Rossetti: "I can answer for the truth of my sketch, as will be proved if the picture is ever found" (BR[2] 292). Unfortunately, the sketch has not survived either.

- 2 G. E. Bentley, Jr., who gathered accounts of the lost painting, tells us that Blake was worried about the reception of his exhibition. In the advertisement, for example, he implores viewers to keep an open mind. They will not see "a Madman's Scrawls": "I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide" (E 528). Nonetheless, Robert Hunt wrote a damning review for the *Examiner*, singling out *The Ancient Britons* because of its unusual coloration:

This picture is a complete caricature: one of the bards is singing to his harp in the pangs of death; and though the colouring of the flesh is exactly like hung beef, the artist modestly observes—"The flush of health in flesh ... cannot be like the sickly daubs of Titian or Rubens." (BR[2] 284-85)

Hunt quotes from Blake's catalogue, and the sarcasm is unmistakable. Bentley argues that Hunt took issue with the description rather than the painting (285fn). Kirkup, by comparison, seems to have been unaware of Blake's description (289fn). Put simply, he was awed by what he saw. There is no evidence that he visited the exhibition; he claimed that the painting etched itself into his mind and left an indelible trace.

- 3 The trail of *The Ancient Britons* goes cold in Wales. Little is known about the painting's provenance; the assumption is that William Owen Pughe commissioned it, and took it sometime after the exhibition was dismantled.³ It can be imagined only through the description in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, written to accompany the exhibition. *The Ancient Britons* is a painting that has a special relationship with the narratives about Blake's artistic achievements. That it is inaccessible is intriguing; it is as if this painting were hiding indefinitely, avoiding scrutinizing eyes. It is everything and nothing. If we were to measure Blake against his collected works, we could never establish with certainty how great an artist he really was. Kirkup, perhaps responding to Southey or Hunt, felt compelled not only to talk about the painting but also to re-create it on paper. Would our notions of Blake change, if we were able to view it? Giv-

least in the heads—He did so in the action of the figures as you will see" (BR[2] 289). Kirkup may have been thinking of *Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on Their Journey to Canterbury*, another prominent picture from the 1809 exhibition, in which Blake definitely used the heads but not the figures of Hercules and Apollo, mentioned in the description of *The Ancient Britons* (see E 544).

3. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 329.

en Blake's color experiments, what condition would it be in, had it survived, rolled up, in a dark corner of a Welsh attic or cellar? Most likely, what would be left of this massive painting would no longer resemble Kirkup's sketch, should it ever be rediscovered. Yet Kirkup's singling out of *The Ancient Britons* resonates with the goals of the Ancient Britons team, as well as Morris Eaves's views on editing. Eaves uses this painting as a test case and speculates about its representation in the *Blake Archive*: "Is it helpful to provide a proportional space for the missing object and embed it in the verbal-visual web of scholarly apparatus that supports other works in the *Archive*?"⁴ This review explores the most recent artistic and scholarly responses to Blake's lost painting in order to argue that such preoccupations, in Eaves's sense, enable us to understand Blake, as well as ourselves, better: "We human beings are, utterly, editorial beings. Our inclinations for sorting the more from the less relevant, for obsessive pattern recognition, and for the decision-making processes fed by such inclinations, are the constituents of core editorial acts" (Eaves 531). Why does *The Ancient Britons* appeal? Perhaps the attraction is the fundamental disagreement about the artistic merit of the largest picture that Blake ever painted.

- 4 The artworks created by the Ancient Britons team are the result of critically informed readings and imaginings of the painting as it is described by Blake in *A Descriptive Catalogue*. These works were first exhibited in Stuttgart from 29 October 2020, with the exhibition temporarily closed in November and extended to 4 December. Its centerpiece, *The Ancient Britons*, is heralded a success: the team "has succeeded to re-imagine this largest of Blake's works, using old and new artistic techniques."⁵ The announcement acknowledges the challenges of lockdown, but only to align the situation with Blake's: "With Covid-19, the exhibition will now take place under similarly poor conditions as the original presentation. Everyone who will not see it will contribute to its success." The project of the Ancient Britons team was in three parts. After the exhibition, presented as an ironic inversion of Blake's failure to connect with his audiences in 1809, came the website, launched in July 2021, with images, clips, and texts that were hard to read on account of dark color combinations.⁶ The exercise culminated in a book, which synthesizes the materials and experiences shared via the website and also frames them with a scholarly essay. With this combination, or rather succession, of materials,

4. Morris Eaves, "The Editorial Void: Notes toward a Study of Oblivion," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 80.3 (autumn 2017): 517-38 (on 535).

5. See <<https://www.abk-stuttgart.de/aktuell/veranstaltung/the-ancient-britons-die-erscheinung-eines-verschollenen-bilds-the-ancient-britons-the-appearance-of-a-vanished-picture.html>>.

6. <<https://ancientbritons.org>> (no longer active when checked in January 2024).

the team offers what Eaves has termed “authentic *editorial* responses that might at least create useful opportunities to ponder once again what it takes to transmit information from generation to generation” (522). However, if the painting is truly lost, what can the Ancient Britons team transmit? This review, moving between all aspects of the project, will discuss the aspirations of the exhibition and its afterlife online and in book form.

- 5 This undertaking points to the value of *The Ancient Britons*; the readings and imaginings grounded in Blake’s verbal description set in motion a creative process, one that connects to popular themes in the wider context of Blake studies. The lost painting works as a catalyst; its qualities have inspired new art. What the team offers exists in a different medium; the members do not restore the painting or even evoke its presence, but transform and translate it into something that will not be easily forgotten, while adding to the achievements of Blake’s German reception. There is a tradition in the German reception—following in the footsteps of Yeats—that has always engaged with the effect of Blake’s visions. This project is a response to the occult leanings that have long been seen in Blake’s art. So, if we think of this strand as the esoteric tradition, then once again Blake has found his place in the academic and popular spheres of Germany.
- 6 The book starts with an extract from Henry Crabb Robinson’s article on Blake, published anonymously in German in Friedrich Perthes’s short-lived *Vaterländisches Museum* (1811). Robinson introduces *The Ancient Britons* as “Blakes grösstes und vollendetstes Werk” (“Blake’s biggest and most accomplished work”) and identifies the qualities of the three Ancient Britons (strong, beautiful, ugly) with Blake’s descriptions translated into German (7). The Ancient Britons team accept the painting as lost and anticipate the expectations we might have by proposing that their work is not an act of restoration but a cure for the painful absence of Blake’s masterpiece. The book’s subtitle announces the team’s creative task and artistic conceit: *Erscheinungen eines verschollenen Bildes/Apearances of a Vanished Picture*. The words are carefully chosen—it is impossible for the lost painting to “manifest”; “appear” suggests that what “vanished” still exists but is not visible (“verschollen”); it can be returned to sight. Among the team, who are listed in alphabetical order, is Alexander Roob, professor of graphic design and painting at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Stuttgart. Roob has various Blake-related works and performances to his name, Blake’s poetry being one of his main interests.⁷ This most recent project was with his students.

7. For details, see my chapter “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany and in Austria: After 1900,” *The Reception of William Blake in*

The Ancient Britons started in the autumn of 2019; in the book, there is no assembling of missing pieces—only hints, in footnotes, at the sources and contexts.⁸

- 7 In the introduction (“Imagine”) we are invited to consider Blake’s “remarkable, sculptural power of imagination” and “quasi holographic visions” (15).⁹ Here, the team delineate how they “succeeded ... in letting this ... largest work by Blake reappear using old and new techniques.” They write, “We attempted to gain access to the lost painting via inner visualizations, facilitated during a seminar week at the Bodensee by a group trance guided by the hypnosis researcher and Mesmer specialist Walter Bongartz” (14-15).¹⁰ The group trance was complemented by a “phase of joint reconstruction,” where “individual ideas were compared with the details of Blake’s description of the picture.” They explain the notion of shared vision in terms of “archetypes available in limited numbers in an eternal storage” or “Platonic ‘cloud’” (15). Borrowing Charles Lamb’s term “retro-visions,” the team propose that Blake’s painting “must still exist and can be ‘loaded’ using techniques similar to those that Blake employed for his visualization” (16). Thinking about these visions in terms of self-hypnosis, “trance literature,” and inspiration from Paracelsus and Böhme, if not Mesmer himself, they offer new interpretations of Blake’s working practice. In “Reimagination/Reimagination” and “Rekonstruktion/Reconstruction” they share photographs to document their creative trance process. This section dates the various experiments to 28 October to 2 November 2019; these were developed “via video teleconference” (20) and the lockdowns of 2020. The goal was to feel and to embody Blake’s strong, beautiful, and ugly men (27). The results of the experiments were figures in clay and 3D, as seen on screenshares in the book. The book then turns to address the failure of the exhibition in 2020: “Hardly anyone saw it. After two days the exhibition had to close again” (38). The circumstances of an unseen exhibition—a space deserted on account of COVID-19 precautions—and the situation of

Europe, ed. Sibylle Erle and Morton D. Paley, 2 vols. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) 1: 294-96.

8. The book includes the relevant part of Blake’s *Descriptive Catalogue* (German version first), with punctuation and paragraphs adjusted to make the text more readerly, as well as long explanatory or interpretative footnotes.

9. In the book each chapter is presented first in German and second in English. For this review I have used their English text.

10. This process was captured on the website, where viewers were invited to look at slowly turning clay models while entering a 12:20 min. trance-meditation: “And what happens when the observer allows it [the trance-meditation] to have an effect on him?” The goal, it seems, was to become like the strong, the ugly, and the beautiful. There were also works included on the website that were ongoing, though I could not detect any activity or changes when I examined them.

the artists resonate strongly with the disappointment that Blake must have felt at the response to his own show.

- 8 The exhibition included Dana Kast and Julius Naegele's *Bard*. Photographs in the book show a figure who is narrowly missed by an arrow (40-41); a caption describes this construction as a "mechanical box." Dimitra Gatsiou's the-remin performance of "Jerusalem," Parry's tune of Blake's rallying lyrics, would have made an eerie accompaniment for the centerpiece of the exhibition: the projections of an "appeared" and "vanished" painting. Two photographs reveal a canvas with and without the reconstruction of *The Ancient Britons*, which is a digital montage of drawing, painting, and sculpture, also displayed as a fold-out (60-61). This montage shows three figures, with the young and beautiful man leading the way, flanked by the ugly (to his right) and the strong (to his left). The figures, walking through—no, over—heaps of corpses, are against a red sun setting in a red landscape. In the right-hand corner (from the viewer's position), we see the bard underneath his harp, pierced with a long spear; the figure is inspiration for the body in Kast and Naegele's mechanical box. Another work of art is Hendrik Fleck's etching "The Ancient Britons" (94-95). Its subtitle, "Einzelvision/Single Vision," indicates that it is one of a series in the exhibition.¹¹
- 9 There is much to say about Roob's essay, "When Klopstock Defied Blake and Ancient Britons Were Suddenly Germans. A Revision of the Large Blake Exhibition in Hamburg in 1975." Roob, like the book as a whole, starts with Robinson's contribution to Perthes's patriotic periodical *Vaterländisches Museum*. He zooms in on a comment about Blake's work containing phrases "which one would have expected from a German rather than an Englishman" to ask, "How German was this Blake really?" (97). What he proposes is a playful approach to identity and themes that can be harnessed in national crises to articulate a message. Blake, in other words, is still speaking to his German audiences. Roob alludes to the "mass appeal" (97) that Robinson was predicting, and looks toward Werner Hofmann's triumph of 1975, but only to claim that the first major Blake exhibition abroad was a failure. Hofmann (and David Bindman) did not sufficiently explore Blake's thwarted relations with Klopstock: "The second bridge that Werner Hofmann had expected from the Hamburg exhibition could only end in a construction site without the knowledge of this radical pietistic interconnection [Blake's Moravian upbringing through his mother] and without an interpreta-

11. The website included a video (1:04:30) that offered a viewing experience of an evolving plate: three figures emerged against the shape of a cloaked, faceless figure. Lines and textures appeared, accompanied by a heavily distorted bass line washed with delay and reverb, built of random notes.

tion of the Klopstock context" (113-14). Roob seems to imply that this context, and especially "the bardic competition" (102) between Klopstock and Milton, explain Blake's ambitions for the epic forms of the late illuminated books *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Consequently, he picks up the trail of research on the significance of the popular German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, reminding us that Perthes dedicated *Vaterländisches Museum* to Klopstock, whose *Messiah* Blake ridiculed in his Notebook. Blake, for Roob, is an unacknowledged forerunner of both the German and the English national movements:

During Blake's period of education, the national-mythical "bard roaring" of the Klopstockians had become so loud that it could be clearly heard in England as well. Many years before people started staging themselves on the island as new druids, members of the German Hainbund came together, crowned with oak leaves, as Celtic-Germanic poet-singers, fantasizing under power-bestowing trees about being in a pseudohistorical counterworld whose emotional depth stood in programmatic opposition to the rationality of Enlightenment. (100-01)

The short run of *Vaterländisches Museum* included not only Robinson's essay on Blake but also "excerpts of Klopstock's unpublished writings" (101). Anglo-German relations, then and now, are important for understanding Blake as an artist and thinker.

- 10 Roob follows Alexander Regier's *Exorbitant Enlightenment* (2018),¹² which argues that Blake "does not fit into our normal account of the Enlightenment or British Romanticism" (Regier 9). For Roob's reading of Anglo-German relations, the business and activities of the German printseller and publisher Rudolph Ackermann are crucial, because Ackermann completely ignored Blake's contribution when he reprinted Cromek's edition of Blair's *Grave*; the lack of recognition "must have hurt Blake tremendously" (Roob 105). This strand of the argument also engages with the patriotic struggle of the German states and their emerging cultural consciousness: "The propagandistic potentials of works such as ... *The Ancient Britons* ... must have evoked, even in the face of reservations regarding the artist's idiosyncrasies, the idea of a robust national art, as it began to emerge in Germany only decades later with the new foundation of the Reich" (108).
- 11 Roob contends that Blake came across Klopstock in his younger days.¹³ He writes that "there were no translations of

12. Alexander Regier, *Exorbitant Enlightenment: Blake, Hamann, and Anglo-German Constellations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

13. This circumstance (Blake's early awareness of Klopstock) would explain the sharp satirical tone of the Klopstock verses in the Notebook; they sound like lines from *An Island in the Moon* (1784?).

[Klopstock's] popular odes Yet it can be assumed that [Blake] was also sufficiently informed of this part of Klopstock's production, at least well enough to gauge how massive the challenge posed by the Germanic Milton was" (100). On the whole, Roob's often fierce argument is a little hostile toward "Anglo-centric Blake research," excepting the work of Keri Davies, Colin Podmore, and Marsha Keith Schuchard on the Moravians (112-14). In considering the influence of the Moravians, he notes, "Zinzendorf was the rousing theological advocate of bodily energies, whose presence Blake had missed in Klopstock's *Messiah*" (114). At the same time, Roob is sometimes vague on the parameters of Blake's reception: is what he describes as a "loose connection" between Blake and Runge, cemented by Hofmann's exhibition cycle *Kunst um 1800*, a matter of influence or of similarity and confluence perceived by those undertaking "Blake research"? The latter, of course, chimes with what the Ancient Britons team set out to do. Roob, I think, wills this connection into existence. He makes it appear; there is no concrete evidence for it. Conversely, the confluence of Klopstock and Blake invites us to think about process and collaboration more broadly. Roob determines that Blake knew about Klopstock through his friends, such as Henry Fuseli ("who, like most of the Sturm und Drang adherents from the circle of the Zurich Milton translator Jakob Bodmer, was a great admirer of Klopstock"),¹⁴ or even Thomas Holcroft, "a befriended republican poet, publisher and translator, who had visited Klopstock in Hamburg in 1799" (100). Ultimately, Roob—much like Regier, who argues fervently for how Blake can be "unlocked through multilingualism" and "polyglot criticism" that "allows us to see different relations" (Regier 27)—simplifies some of Blake's working contexts. Blake was a commercial engraver who developed his own graphic technique and printed his own works while pursuing his dream of finding recognition as a painter. In line with the esoteric tradition, Roob appears to think, perhaps unfortunately, that Anglo-German relations reinforced Blake's artistic process through some kind of channeling.¹⁵ He is almost too eager

14. See Regier 100-18.

15. Roob traces Blake's knowledge of Klopstock through Fuseli back to Lavater (100), claiming that Blake "admired" Lavater (114). This assumption originates in Regier, who, writing about Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, not only discards the possibility that Fuseli authored the final aphorism, which has no precursor in either of the German source texts and could only ever be verified if the specially prepared manuscript were found, but also states: "Blake's annotations to the volume show us that he understood Lavater's book as a hermeneutics and as a study in friendship" (Regier 120). Lavater did believe that good friends looked alike. In physiognomical terms, physical resemblance suggested shared interests or moral disposition. However, communicating those "views on the immanence of language" (Regier 119) was not devoid of challenges. Mary Lynn Johnson's important scholarship on Blake and Lavater delineates the milestones in the financial ne-

to provide proof for his idea. This may be a result of wanting—like Robinson—to see Blake as symptomatically "German."

- 12 What is missing from Roob's account is Blake's life and collaboration with William Hayley, the well-connected gentleman poet then famous for his mock epic *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781) and biography of Milton (1794). We know that Blake did not like Klopstock, an opinion that was diametrically opposite to that of Hayley, his patron, who thought that Klopstock was Milton's equal. The men sat together and discussed Klopstock's *Messiah*,¹⁶ and it was Hayley who commissioned Blake to paint a portrait of Klopstock as part of a series of eighteen poets for his new library in Felpham (Butlin #343.16). Instead, Roob traces Blake's resentment of Klopstock through the Notebook, back to the versions of "London" where he "writes about *german forged links* in whose power the desperate residents of the English capital find themselves" (102). Narrow though this interpretation is, it is fascinating, as it ties artistic and aesthetic explorations to political domination. The idea is substantiated with an insightful delineation of the German resistance against Napoleon's advancing army (106-12). Roob does much to make Blake relevant: Robinson discerned in Blake the "potential of resistance" (109) for German politics, much needed also in Britain, whose response to Napoleon is likened to Cold War tactics—"a cultural political move comparable with the CIA's launching of 'liberal'-abstract trends" (110). It comes as no surprise that Roob then aligns the efforts of Robinson and Ackermann in rescuing Blake from obscurity for "the anti-Napoleonic cause": "It is not improbable that the former *Times* correspondent [Robinson] was involved in Ackermann's covert activities due to his strategic knowledge, and also that Ackermann was aware of the planned contribution to the *Vaterländisches Museum*" (111). More generally,

gotiations between and practical challenges for Lavater and his English publishers, translators, and engravers. See "Blake's Engravings for Lavater's *Physiognomy*: Overdue Credit to Chodowiecki, Schellenberg, and Lips," *Blake* 38.2 (fall 2004): 52-74.

16. Hayley owned several editions of *Der Messias* (1748-73). He may have read to Blake in German and certainly translated the verse into English on 26 and 27 March 1803 to mark Klopstock's death. Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick write about this, as well as a rediscovered letter from Blake to Hayley that may allude to Klopstock's first wife, Margaret. They hint at the possibility that the conversations between Hayley and Blake about Klopstock were extensive, and suggest that Hayley had paid Catherine Blake a compliment for being, like Mrs. Klopstock, a devoted wife, muse, and critic in one. This engagement with Klopstock is why Crosby and Essick date the satirical verse in the Notebook to the years in Felpham. If this is the case, Blake's attack on Klopstock is more complex than Roob makes it out to be. See Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick, "'the fiends of Commerce': Blake's Letter to William Hayley, 7 August 1804," *Blake* 44.2 (fall 2010): 52-72 (on 71).

in connection with the destruction of the cities and landscapes of Ukraine, for example, the post-battle scene of *The Ancient Britons* no doubt resonates with modern audiences.

- 13 Another unexpected but noteworthy move is Roob's association of John Varley with the circle around Ackermann (115-16). When it comes to the Visionary Heads, Roob talks about Blake's "dialogue with the dead" ("Totengespräche") and Blake and Varley's "spiritistic séances" (116), thus once again oversimplifying the complexity of collaboration and, in this case, opinions about the spiritual world. This world, for Blake at least, was inhabited with creatures that had never lived in a conventional sense, such as the ghost of a flea, or were characters in the Bible and in legends, such as Job and Robin Hood. We don't know if any of Blake's choices and portraits thereof baffled Varley, who accepted the flea as the perfect embodiment of Gemini. Varley took an interest in astrology, hence the title of the work that the Visionary Heads were for (*Zodiacal Physiognomy*), and Blake in his drawings was also responding to the popular practice of phrenology. Roob seems to draw and rely on Robinson, who wrote: "Our author lives, like Swedenborg, in communication with the angels" (BR[2] 599). While Swedenborg, for Robinson, is part of the history of Blake's varied religious background, Roob must have decided to ignore Swedenborg, which, given the group's focus on vision, is an astonishing omission. Perhaps Roob and the team wanted to believe that Blake did not just have visions but had a trance practice that followed Mesmer's.
- 14 Robinson struggled to comprehend the nature of Blake's visions. He was also not impressed with *A Descriptive Catalogue*: "The original consists of a complete mish-mash of fragmentary utterances on art and religion, without plan or arrangement, and the artist's idiosyncrasies will in this way be most clearly shown" (BR[2] 596). Still, as Roob emphasizes, he put his finger on why Blake appeals and matters today. Blake's singular originality, which once pushed him into isolation in his homeland, spoke and speaks to his German audiences. Maybe, to export Blake, Robinson had to overstate that Blake was an outsider: "Although he afterwards studied at the Royal Academy, he had already shown his bent to an art so original that, isolated from his fellow-students, he was far removed from all usual, ordinary employment" (BR[2] 595). Robinson's article for Perthes is no doubt a key text of Blake's early reception, but Roob's essay ends teasingly and with a gesture toward patriotic struggles:

In the end, Blake's legend was not perpetuated where Crabb Robinson saw it, in the continental culture of the Old Empire, but was instead oriented to where Blake had dreamed of his transatlantic giant, Albion, in a globally re-

publican way, in the direction in which the red-skinned *Ancient Britons* had also pointed, of whom Crabb Robinson in his *Reminiscences* had assumed that they were actually not Britons but American natives. (117)

We cannot ever establish what Blake's *Ancient Britons* looked like. Roob here offers an interesting twist on Robinson's interpretation of Blake's coloring, while ignoring comments on color experiments in the *Descriptive Catalogue* itself. Blake's purpose was to do a retrospective but also to show off his rediscovery of "the lost art of fresco" (BR[2] 596). In this passage, Roob is not only incorporating Robinson's declaration of Blake's difference, the aesthetic boldness of his color experiments, but also gesturing toward Blake's subsequent thriving American reception.

- 15 In the end, this exercise says and shows much about the ingenuity of Blake's ongoing German reception. Like Blake's exhibition of 1809, the exhibition curated by the Ancient Britons team presented the absence of visitors as a test case for greatness. Even though COVID regulations rather than lack of interest prevented audiences from attending, non-attendance and ignorance were counted as contributions to this show's success. The tone of defiance in the announcement is all too familiar; Blake, too, despite everything, would not be deterred. The exhibition of 2020 has vanished; it reappeared on the website and endures in the book. The creation of the website and publication of the book perpetuated and propelled the project's momentum, but one fact remains: hardly anyone saw the exhibition and, since the website has vanished, hardly anyone will be able to imagine it, unless another Kirkup comes along. Nevertheless, the Ancient Britons team has left us, in my opinion, with a "surrogate" for Blake's lost painting (Eaves 533). Granted, the digital montage can never replace *The Ancient Britons*, but the space that has been left deliberately empty in the past has been temporarily filled. Will other "surrogate" paintings follow? This undertaking highlights, beyond any doubt, something fundamental about Blake: how productive "mis-readings" of his art and poetry can be, especially in a wider European, if not global as well as trans-historical, conversation about Blake.