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THE VAST COMPLEXITIES OF THE SMALL
Miniaturisations in Nordic late-medieval material and visual culture

ABSTRAKT

Att göra miniatyrer (på engelska "miniaturisation") innebär två ingrepp. För det första sammaflätas den "större" med sin "mindre" kopia, vilket leder till likhet i både form och mening mellan originalet och dess miniatyr. För det andra bryter förminskningen den vardagliga upplevelsen då den förvränger känslan av skala. Denna artikel analyserar dessa två förminskningens funktioner inom kyrkliga föremål i 1500- samt 1600-talens nordiska länder, framförallt i det svenska riket, inklusive Finland. Vi visar att begreppet förminskning är användbart i analysen av konstverk och andra föremål för att den erbjuder ett nytt perspektiv till kombinationen av materiell och visuell kultur, och gör det lättare att redovisa de komplicerade sambanden mellan bild och föremål. Under medeltiden var miniatyrer kopplade till materialitet och hur material upplevdes som levande och aktivt. Att förminska var ett verktyg, som användes för att skapa materiella associationer och betydelser. Skapandet av miniatyrer tillät en att kombinera religiösa bilder med andligt materia, både i religiösa och sekulära sfärer. Tekniken påverkades av förändringar i sena medeltida konsumtionsvanor, vilka präglades av privat tro.

Keywords: iconology, late-medieval imagery, liturgical objects, materiality, miniaturisation.

The technique of miniaturisation is as old as visual culture itself. For instance, the Greek and Roman Antiquity provides a cornucopia of examples of miniaturised items, like figurines, used, e.g., in politics, devotion and entertainment. Although some general notions on miniaturisation can be presented, the technique is a profoundly relational and historical phenomenon, and thus affected by changes in material culture and social reality at large. Hence it is more appropriate to use the term in the plural to emphasise the multitude of ways in which miniatures were used, instead of searching for a general model of how the technology has been applied through the ages.

During the Middle Ages, devotional and secular lives in the Occident were permeated by minuteness, partiality, and making things small. In fact,

the etymology of the words *miniature* and *miniaturisation* can be traced back to this period. The hand-written initials, paragraph signs and headings in manuscripts were made with orange or red lead, *minium* in Latin. By extension, the verb *miniare* refers to the process of painting in red, and small illustrations in manuscripts became consequently known as miniatures.[1] Miniaturisations became ubiquitous in the Latin West after what scholars call ”the visual turn” of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It refers to a novel focus on visuality on many levels, including the importance given to seeing relics and the consecrated host, the emphasis on decorative elements in devotional life, and the contemplation of the acts of seeing and unseeing.[2]

Although late-medieval devotional life was highly visual, the historian Caroline Walker Bynum underscores that ”the visual turn” did not mean turning away from the material towards the visual, but on the contrary, a turn towards objects and their materiality. Senses became vital for engaging with the holy. This sensual tendency meant a drastic expansion in the presence of visual material and objects in medieval society. In addition, the immense attention to relics, for instance, can be seen to reflect medieval interest in minimizing and fragmenting the large into smaller equivalents: relics as tiny parts of people or their belongings carried the entirety of sanctity in them. Similarly ”parts” themselves gained increasing consideration: prayers listed Virgin Mary’s individual body parts, and the wounds of Christ were painted as separate visual motifs. Beside sacred art, miniaturisations were used for purely secular purposes as well. Particularly interesting are instances in which the technique of miniaturisation is harnessed to transfer contexts and motifs from overtly sacred to secular. It entangled the devotional sphere with other domains of life, and revealed the division between the sacred and the secular to be superfluous.[3]

Miniaturisation is a fascinating technique that creates two seemingly contrary operations or gestures. In scholarly discourse, medieval miniaturisations often mean scaling down large, public and liturgical pictorial motifs borrowed from buildings, wall paintings and sculpture, and applying them on portable objects of private devotional or secular use. This is the entanglement of the larger or ’normal’ with its smaller-scale copy, denoting similarity in both the form and the meaning of the two entities. The word ”normal” cannot be given a fixed definition as it is a context sensitive and relative term. Secondly, miniaturisation may cause a puncture in the context into which the miniature is placed. The distinct scale disrupts the everyday experience and requires a change in attention to proportion and details. In the present article, we will analyse how these two operations of miniaturisation were utilised, and how they linked different material and visual contexts.[4] Our focus will

be on late-medieval Northern Europe, particularly the Kingdom of Sweden. We will discuss internationally poorly known late-medieval source material from the North, and how the concept of miniaturisation opens up new perspectives to it.

We will expand the implications of the double gesture – i.e. the relation between ”normal” and ”small”, and the ability to cause a puncture – and analyse the ontological bind that connects the two operations into one technique. First, we will suggest that this binding element is the corporeal experience of things and their scale. Secondly, this experience conditions the concrete relation between objects, images and their materials and media, but also another, more abstract, iconographic aspect of devotional miniaturisations. After these provisional insights, we will proceed to the analysis of particular late-medieval items and their contexts, and highlight how miniaturisations functioned in the historical, social and devotional setting. We will argue that the use of miniatures in the late-medieval piety is entangled with materiality, and how it was conceived as animate and active.

COMPLEXITIES OF MINIATURISATION

Due to its diversity, miniaturisation poses a challenge for any structural characterisation. An image or object being ”small” or ”large” is not in itself an indicator of miniaturisation.[5] Miniaturisation is rather a relation between two entities, and only through this relation one of the two becomes defined as ”small” and the other normative in size. Accordingly, miniaturisation is best described as an act in which a form is copied and simultaneously diminished in scale with the aim to establish an entanglement of the two entities. Here entanglement implies that the two items share, to some extent, an ontological basis, and miniaturisation pushes this basis to the fore.

Although relational, miniaturisation has a nexus of a sort in the human body, as is pointed out, among others, by anthropologist John Mack. The body sets the baseline to the experience of scale, and miniaturised entities are recognised as miniatures in relation to the body.[6] The body is also involved with miniaturisation in a practical sense, as the craftsperson or artist manipulating the scale and producing the scaled-down image or object has to be particularly skilful in order to succeed. The miniature implies a controlled set of actions, or, as the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard famously writes: ”the cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it”.[7] Of course, it is not only an issue involving the crafters' skill, but also the materials they are working with. Some raw materials, e.g. ivory which was a relatively popular

in devotional objects, are better suited for small-scale processing than others.

The relation between corporeality and miniaturisation is also relevant for the particular operation that the miniature performs: puncturing. This refers to the capacity of the miniature to disturb its context, give it another kind of significance.[8] This capacity can be paralleled with the French philosopher Roland Barthes's much referred to discussion on *punctum* in relation to photography. He makes a distinction between *studium* and *punctum*, where the former refers to the general, disorganised engagement with the photograph in which cultural decoding has the primary role. It is the conventional way in which images are seen. *Punctum*, by contrast, is something emotional and moving that emerges from the image like an arrow, pricks the context and sets the experiential point of gravity. Crucially, as the affective aspect of a photograph, *punctum* is based on a bodily experience.[9] In miniatures, the corporeality of the puncture refers to the sense of abnormal scale, something that cannot be grasped strictly on the basis of everyday routines. However, it is possible to ask whether punctum wears out and becomes mundane when miniaturisation is used constantly, like in the Late Middle Ages. To answer, it should be pointed out first that Barthes discusses modern photographs, which are abundantly available, and yet maintain the possibility of punctum. Moreover, miniaturisations are contextual and relative phenomena, the intensity of their punctum varies. Arguably increased anti-naturalism, disproportionality and the occurrence of miniatures in unexpected contexts increase the force of punctum.

Following Barthes's argument, Susan Stewart, an American literary critic, interprets the puncture caused by the miniature in temporal terms: the miniature reveals ”a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception”. All miniatures distil and represent things as they are known to be somewhere else in some other situation. In this way, miniaturisation distorts and negates the time and space relations of the mundane reality: the miniature is not attached to the lived historical time, but transforms it into ”the infinite time of reverie”.[10] In other words, the reduction in scale does not diminish the significance of the miniature, but instead heightens and changes it, and thus the miniature always affects the context in which it occurs.[11]

In a devotional context miniaturisations have two important aspects. The first concerns the miniaturised motifs purely as such. This aspect has long been studied in art history, usually under the heading of ”iconology” or ”iconography”. As a disciplinary practice, it consists – to simplify a manifold discussion – of identifying pictorial motifs and analysing their meaning by contextualisation. The iconographical content of motifs is drawn from a pool

of sources, including theological discourse, hagiographies, miracle stories, mythological and astrological treatises and so forth. The analysis remains inadequate without comparisons with other visual motifs, other ”types” of the same motif, and some understanding of stylistic development.[12]

If the focus is on the formal iconographic differentiation and identification of pictorial forms, the size and scale of the motifs is not so significant. However, if iconology is understood as a search for an intrinsic meaning, the scale is of vital importance. As the art historian Michael Ann Holly states, iconology asks ”why certain images, attitudes, historical situations, and so forth have assumed one particular shape at one particular time”.[13] The meaning of an image may change with its size. The second aspect of miniaturisations, in medieval works of art in particular, is the scale and the medium on which the motifs are applied. In analysing late-medieval miniaturisations, it is essential to consider their twofold nature – the iconographical, and the material.

Often the assumption is of scaling down, i.e. that the direction of miniaturisation is from public large-scale monuments to more private small-scale objects.[14] Indeed, *directionality* is one of the four properties of miniaturisation that the archaeologist Carl Knappett distinguishes. The others are *frequency*, referring to differences in the density at which distinct images or objects appear miniaturised: which forms are more canonical than others? The *fidelity* of miniaturisations, in turn, denotes how faithfully the small-scale version copies its counterpart. Lastly, *distance* describes to what extent the association between the two entities is revealed by their proximity to each other in time and space, or whether this has only little relevance for their association.[15] These four properties help in analysing late-medieval miniaturisations.

FIDELITY AND FREQUENCY SKEWED BY THE REALITY EFFECT

The making of devotional imagery in the Middle Ages was not directed by ”naturalism” or visual fidelity as such, although they did play a role.[16] According to the art historian Keith Moxey, late-medieval devotional culture established its relation to the contemporary material culture in terms of a ”reality effect”. This was a visual strategy of deploying recognisable, everyday visual rhetoric so that the Christian narrative became relevant and accessible to everyone. Ecclesiastical images and objects depicted and transmitted the sacred, and for this purpose, miniaturisations as a technology of engagement

with the devotee and the sacred formed a powerful tool, implying the unity of devotion, regardless of where it was employed.[17] Miniaturisation was a suitable tool when visual fidelity was a secondary concern.

A typical reason for resorting to miniaturisation is to emphasise hierarchical difference between two persons. The non-naturalistic scale denoted the relative importance of the represented figures: in the *hierarchical proposition* the larger the depicted figure was in comparison to others, the more sacred or important it became. An example is the custom of representing the donors of works of art as tiny figures kneeling before the much larger saints. The same visual device is present, e.g., in the depictions of St Ursula sheltering the Eleven Thousand Virgins with her cloak, and in the motif known as the Virgin of Mercy, which shows a group of believers, or humankind, standing under the Virgin Mary's protective, enveloping mantle.

Yet there are a number of instances where the hierarchical order does not work. A case in point is the *Vierge ouvrante* or the Shrine Madonna. It refers to a three-dimensional figure of the Virgin Mary, which can be opened like a shrine, showing an iconographical motif, often the Holy Trinity, in small scale inside her. Such a composition raised questions already in the Middle Ages since it obviously hinted to the possibility of seeing the Virgin as a more powerful figure than the Godhead.[18] Art historian Elina Gertsman discusses miniaturisation in these sculptures and argues that ”miniaturization invites conflicting modes of perception: it is thus an ideal index for the Virgin as a gate at once opened and shut, as a container simultaneously sealed and generative”.[19] She stresses the close relationship between the miniature and the intimate linked to each other through the act of opening: ”The miniaturization reclaims the world within the Virgin's womb for its viewers at the same time as it implies temporal distance”.[20] Gertsman compares the intimate inside of Shrine Madonnas to relics and the host, and suggests that miniaturisation complicates ”the visual and haptic accessibility of the Virgin's body, serving as a predicate of (in)accessibility”.[21]

The Trinity motif itself, often inside the Shrine Madonnas, in turn, is another instance of miniaturisation as it consists of God the Father holding the miniaturised Christ on the cross in his hands. The Shrine Madonna in Misterhult Church, Sweden, serves as an example of multiple miniaturisations: its inner core comprises the Holy Trinity scene combined with the motif of the Virgin of Mercy exhibiting a group of devotees (Fig. 1).

Hierarchical proportioning of figures did not rigidly translate into more holy persons being always larger in size. It was a more flexible device for establishing meaning. While dead Christ could be pictured normal-sized in his Mother's or Father's arms, his body could be depicted in minuscule as well. A

Figure 1. Polychrome *Vierge ouvrante* of wood in Misterhult Church, Sweden, the early 14th century. Photo: Elina Räsänen (ER).

motif called *pietà corpusculum* is a late-medieval pietà (Vesperbild) type in which child-sized Christ lies in the arms of the Virgin, though Christ is by no means a lesser figure than his Mother. The art historian Michael Camille points out that this pictorial miniaturisation of Christ expressed his humanity. Depicting Christ as a doll-like figure was interrelated with the visual device of feminisation and infantilization. This was based on the association between femininity and the small. Moreover, miniaturising Christ made him ”vulnerable and yet paradoxically powerful”, and evoked empathy and compassion in the beholders.[22]

Size can have a crucial impact on iconology. A similar reformulation of meaning as with pietà occurs with the *Anna Selbdritt* imagery. The motif depicts St Anne with her daughter, the Virgin Mary, and the Christ Child, and was particularly popular during the latter part of the fifteenth century.[23] It usually involved the miniaturisation of Mary and Jesus in relation to the figure of Anne who holds them on her lap.

In the *Anna Selbdritt* imagery, miniaturisation was employed in two main ways, though the division between them is not clear-cut. Firstly, the Virgin and Child were represented more or less in ”natural” size relative to each other on the lap of the much bigger grandmother. An example of this is the polychrome wooden sculpture in the parish church of Luvia, Finland dated to the mid-1400s (Fig. 7). Some images belonging to this group, however, render the pair of the Virgin and Child puzzlingly tiny, as if they were solely St Anne's attributes. The sculpted group in the Three Magi altarpiece of Hammarby Church, Sweden, circa 1470, exemplifies such a case.[24] The minute Mother and Child appear as attributes in the arms of St Anne. The two small

figures distinguish St Anne from other married female saints like St Bridget.

The second main usage of the St Anne miniaturisation was to represent her along with the Christ Child in naturalistic size, while Mary is shown as the diminutive one, even as a little girl. This is apparent, for instance, in the altarpiece sculptures at the Swedish churches of Lena (Uppsala, 1491) and Kungs-Barkarö (Västmanland, early 16th century).[25] They represent the two ”children” on St Anne's lap. The effect is even more striking when the Virgin stands by her mother – as in the puzzling image of crowned St Anne in the church of Lokalahti, Finland. It depicts St Anne as the primal mother, whereas the Virgin appears as an adolescent beside her.[26] The archaeologist and art historian C. A. Nordman points out the connection between *pietà corpusculum* and *Anna Selbdritt* with the tiny Virgin. He proposes that the former should be seen as an analogical predecessor for the latter.[27]

In the late *Anna Selbdritt* imagery from the early 16th century – including representations of the holy kinship – miniaturisation was not preferred, but instead the three figures were depicted in naturalistic size in relation to each other. A good example is the central group of the mighty St Nicholas altarpiece by Hermen Rode in Tallinn (presently Niguliste Museum).[28] The use of naturalistic scale, as Räsänen has argued, enhances the devotional power of the group and its role as an *Andachtsbild* compared to, say, the Throne of Grace, or pietà, and stresses the narrative element of the image. However, the meeting of the Virgin with her mother after she had given birth to Jesus does not belong to the standard legends of neither scenes.[29] The holy kinship, i.e. the imagery that derived from the expanding veneration of St Anne, deployed similar means, but now offering ways to stress the male lineage as well. The sculpted figures of the altarpieces at the churches of Fresta and Ål in Sweden, depict Mary's cousin Elve with his son Ernim holding a tiny figure of a bishop. He is Ernim's son Servatius wearing a mitre.[30] Consequently, the technique of miniaturisation in the *Anna Selbdritt* groups has a drastic effect on their iconology. Miniaturisation raises the status of the image to a more abstract and mysterious level, distancing it from an everyday homey image of generational affection to an image that invites to devotional contemplation.

In addition to ecclesiastical sculptures, the two ways of employing miniaturisation on the St Anne motif is present on other media too. In a late-medieval silver ring found in Ikaalinen, Finland, the motif on the bezel depicts St Anne with the Virgin and Child.[31] The two latter figures are almost of the same size. The reason for the large size of the Christ Child may have depended entirely on the medium: Minuscule Christ was extremely difficult not only to make, but also to identify. On the other hand, in a small 15th-century dress fastener of gilt silver, recently found in Hauho, Finland, St Anne and the Vir-

Figure 2. *Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple*, circa 1490. Detail of the altarpiece of polychrome oak in Vöyri Church, Finland. Photo: Petter Martiskainen.

gin Mary are larger than the Christ Child (Fig. 8). The two objects emphasise different elements of the same motif, the *Anna Selbdritt*, revealing the twofold nature of miniaturisations – the iconographical, and the material.

Although miniaturisation often denoted hierarchy, it was also a practical way of representing large things, groups or abstractions, such as the soul. Small human figures depicted under St Ursula showed she had a great, even an infinite number of devotees. In the same manner the saved souls were pictured in Abraham's bosom, a few representing numerous.[32] The soul was depicted as a miniaturised human, occasionally beside the body of a dying person. A jarring example is the motif of the Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin. It was visualised showing Christ carrying his mother, the size of an infant, in his arms to heaven. Moreover, there is a particular type of a Visitation motif displaying uterine iconography: two tiny infants, Christ and John the Baptist, are represented in the bellies of the Virgin and St Elisabeth. However, the minuscule figures, such as those in the sculpture of Sånga Church, Sweden,[33] did neither represent foetuses nor were small because of their age. Instead the figures were rather the souls of Christ and his predecessor.

Miniaturisation was applied also when visual realities made it impossible to depict something as big as it should naturalistically be. Such is the case with the emblems or attributes of saints which enabled the figures to be identified. For instance, St Barbara was represented carrying her attribute, a miniaturised tower, while St Margaret held a small dragon, and St Gertrude a model-like monastic building. Saints could be depicted wearing miniaturised versions of their attributes as ornaments on their garments, or pieces of jewellery, neutralising the problem of the attributes' size.

Further examples of multiple miniaturisations can be pointed out in late-medieval altarpieces, which occupied the central point of the ecclesi-

astical space. They were filled with various miniatures, some enclosing one another. The structure of the altarpieces was micro-architectural, often embellished with detailed arches, Gothic windows and finials. The frames were adorned with small figures of saints as if to imitate the actual church interior with its niches and sculptures.

Along with hierarchy, narrative chronology is a common type of miniaturisation. On the painted or sculpted panels of the altarpieces, events taking place at different times were displayed with the help of scaling them down. For instance, the sculpted relief on the doors of the altarpiece from circa 1490 in Vöyri Church, Finland depicts the Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple (Fig. 2). Above this main scene a minute image recalls how Joachim receives the joyous message in the desert, predicting the Virgin's birth. Yet another chronologically orientating function of miniaturisation –though more abstractly – is apparent in the famous *Dance of Death* by Bernt Notke in St Nicholas' Church, Tallinn. In the painting, the grim procession takes place in front of a naturalistic Lübeck landscape. Gertsman points out that the painting captures the ”immediacy of action taking place in the foreground and longing for the idyllic past miniaturised in the background”.[34]

North of the Alps, late-medieval panel paintings established a strong link to miniaturisation even on a practical level since their conventions of representation were heavily indebted to illuminated manuscripts.[35] In fact, Camille proposes that miniaturisation is one of the defining characteristics of what is known as the International Gothic, a style that had its heyday circa 1400.[36] The direction of miniaturisation was twisted, however, by the Flemish altarpieces, produced in great numbers at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. They developed into series of detailed scenes resembling theatre stages, and miniaturisation turned the altarpieces into a collection of scaled-down versions of highly popular mystery plays. These miniaturisations resonated with a wider sphere of material culture than manuscript illuminations and the theatrical stage, but the relationship between ecclesiastical works of art and secular material culture remains largely an uncharted field.[37]

DIRECTION AND DISTANCE IN DEVOTIONAL ART

The ubiquity of the miniaturisation technique often makes it difficult to determine to which direction a miniaturised expression of a certain motif is actually pointing. Does a small crucifix held in one's hand refer to a larger-than-life crucifix displayed in a church, or vice versa, or are they both rather an allusion and link to the idea of the Cross of Christ? In terms of medieval de-

Figure 3. The reliquary chest of wood attributed to St Henry in Turku Cathedral. The object is dated to the early 15th century. Photo: Visa Immonen (VI).

votion, however, such questions can be deemed superfluous as the different-sized versions of the crucifix did not form a hierarchical, directional sequence, but they came into existence simultaneously.

The simultaneity is pertinent in portable reliquaries which were regularly given the shape of ecclesiastical buildings. They both represented churches and were placed inside them, and, in fact, churches themselves were large reliquaries, dwellings of Christ and the saints. An prime example is the church of Nousiainen (Sw. Nousis) which houses the large 15th-century sarcophagus of St Henry of Finland, the patron of the country.[38] Consequently, reliquaries were not only containers for relics with a certain convenient form, but they materially captured the holiness of the bones deposited into them. One Nordic example of an architectural reliquary is made of wood and placed in Turku (Sw. Åbo) Cathedral, Finland. The chest, attributed tentatively to St Henry of Finland is rather simple, but nonetheless architectural in shape (Fig. 3).[39] The basic shape of the chest is a rectangular block with a triangular roof, and like in Gothic architecture, pointed arches and finials rhythmically cover its surfaces. The exact dating as well as its history remains under discussion.[40]

In some cases the hierarchy between the miniature and its model is clear. One of the most widely distributed type of devotional artefacts in medieval Europe were pilgrim badges of pewter. The badges were inexpensive, small-sized versions of devotional objects, such as famous relics, saintly images, or particular shrines. They were carried as tokens of a journey made in order to be close to the sacred objects and sites. As miniatures, badges implied the geographical distance – and devotional proximity – between the badge and its place of origin. Secular badges depicting non-devotional imagery in miniature did not usually have a similar connotation of distance.[41]

Miniaturisation bridges private with public devotion in domestic and portable shrines. They were small-scaled altarpieces for household use, and imitated altar screens and shrines. Figurines resembling ecclesiastical sculptures of biblical figures and saints were common in wealthier domestic spaces as well. The most luxurious ones were made of precious metals, like the golden one with enamel found in Stockholm, representing the standing Virgin Mary with the Child.[42] A much more inexpensive alternative for raw material was clay. The motifs in these items were rather stereotypical and reflected, for instance, the popularity of the Marian cult among the lay people. Figurines of clay were produced in large quantities in Germany and distributed across Northern Europe. Although known also in the North, they do not form as abundant a find group as in Central Europe, though a clay figurine depicting the crowned Virgin Mary with the Child was discovered in Turku, Finland in 2012. This unusual find is dated to the late 15th or the early 16th century. The figurine is unpainted and unglazed, produced in a mould for a wide customer base for domestic use.[43]

Late-medieval clay figurines can be understood, following the art historian Robert S. Nelson's suggestion, as *appropriations*, a concept which resonates with such terms as ”copy” and ”borrowing”. The term denotes reuse and subsequent distortion. Nelson finds a modern example in the horse statues executed in some modern synthetic material at a cemetery gate in Texas. They are shrunken repetitions of the bronze horses of St Mark's Basilica in Venice. While Nelson argues that such appropriations are void of the ”aura” of their models,[44] the same cannot be said of the medieval figurines. Their low-cost materials did not diminish the devotional value. Nonetheless, Nelson's observation that ”taken positively or pejoratively, appropriation is not passive, objective, or disinterested, but active, subjective, and motivated” remains crucial.[45]

Medieval worshippers did not need to have a private shrine, let alone go to the parish church if they wanted to experience devotional art. Household items were dec-

Figure 4. Foot of the 14th-century communion chalice of Östra Ny Church in Norrköping, Sweden. Photo: VI.

orated with minute devotional images. For instance, in 1998, a 14th-century lid for a saltcellar of pewter was found in the remains of a log building erected in Turku in the early 15th century.[46] Beside the lid, the find assemblage of the building indicated that the space was used for dining. The lid is ornamented with pictorial scenes, one of which depicts the crowned Virgin Mary with the Child. These devotional miniatures punctured the act of dining, reminding of its religious significance.

THE CHAINS OF MEANING IN MATERIAL CULTURE

In addition to the figurative motifs, scaling down was supported and channelled with other visual means. For instance, in late-medieval visual culture miniaturisations are typically combined with the use of a medallion, a round or oval frame around the actual motif or scene, both in manuscript illustrations and other pieces of material culture. Medallions and the scenes they frame were pressed on sheets of silver, and the ornaments could be used as dress accessories or attached on reliquaries. Such mounts are mentioned frequently in the catalogues of items confiscated from churches by the Swedish Crown during the Reformation.[47]

Medallions with Christian motifs also appear as ornaments attached on the feet of communion chalices. They were made with matrices found in the Nordic countries, like the one discovered in Turku, Finland. This fourteenth-century matrix has two patterns for producing medallions, one for a Golgotha scene, and the other for a Flagellation of Christ.[48] A sheet of silver was applied on the matrix to transfer the motif to the metal. When the sheet of metal was ready, it could have been used to ornament a range of artefacts. There is a particular group of Swedish fourteenth-century chalices which have similar medallions on their feet (Fig. 4). The medallions on matrices and chalices can be associated visually with the shape of communion wafers and the Christian motifs used on them. For instance, one of the six moulds on a Swedish wafer iron dated to the late medieval or early modern period depicts the crucified Christ in a manner similar to the earlier mentioned Golgotha motif.[49]

The medallion form continued to be used in portrait miniatures of purely secular kind. This was due to the demand for small-scale portraits, which began to flourish among the courtly clientele in the sixteenth century. They were basically offered to patrons as independent works of art, whether for private devotion or as portraits of the patrons themselves. Such portraits still retained the original circular or oval frame even when removed from their initial visual and devotional context.[50]

Miniaturised motifs were also applied on personal adornment, most importantly on finger rings which drew heavily on ecclesiastical art. Some finger rings have bezels adorned not only with figures of sacred persons resembling sculptures in churches, but also with the tabernacles in which the sculpted figures stood. In other rings, the central motif is placed inside a medallion. In the dozens of Nordic silver and gold rings dating to the Late Middle Ages, the most common motif is the Virgin Mary with the Child, but also Golgotha scenes were popular. The Virgin Mary is depicted as the Apocalyptic Woman on an early-16th-century gold ring (Fig. 5), and the same motif appears, for instance, in contemporary wall paintings but, of course, on a much larger size. A similar medallion also surrounds the numerous Golgotha motifs with the crucified Christ flanked by the Virgin Mary and St John.

In addition to finger rings, the Golgotha scenes in medallions are known from pilgrim badges, and from some of the pewter vessels known as ”Hanseatic” jugs or flagons, which had a wide distribution in Scandinavia during the late medieval period. When such a flagon was produced, a metal axle had to be installed through the piece. After the production phase was complete, the axle was removed, leaving a circular hole on the bottom and the lid of the vessel. The holes were closed with medallion-like pieces of pewter. One such 15th-century Hanseatic flagon – bearing the hallmark of the town of Danzig – was discovered in a well near Raseborg Castle, Finland in 1965 (Fig. 6). The medallion on the bottom of the vessel depicts the Golgotha scene, and, indeed, although the Hanseatic flagons were widely used in secular contexts, the medallion as such has a direct parallel in ecclesiastical art.[51]

While the flagon was in everyday use, the religious element remained mostly concealed. The bottom medallion became visible when the contents were poured or the vessel became empty. At that moment, the user experienced the excitement of revelation, and the motif became an admonition to the Christian faith. It acquired a sort of *memento mori* value, like the numerous inscriptions en-

Figure 5. Finger ring of gold found during the dredging of the Aurajoki River in front of Turku Castle in 1860. The central motif depicts the Virgin Mary and the Child inside a band of clouds surrounded by rays of light. Photo: VI.

Figure 6. Hanseatic flagon found near Raasepori Castle, Finland. One of the two hallmarks on the 15th-century is that of the town of Danzig. The object is 22.7 cm in height. The bottom of the flagon shows a small Golgotha scene. Photo: VI.

graved on late-medieval cutlery declaring: ”Eat, drink and be merry, but do not forget God”. Furthermore, medallions appearing on wafer irons, chalices, and flagons form a visual chain which is anchored to the host or the communion wafer and its devotional significance.

MINIATURISATION AS A TECHNIQUE OF ENTANGLEMENT AND PUNCTURE

In discussing the concept of appropriation, Nelson argues that the phenomenon is tied to postmodern consumer culture and its logic of circulation and reuse.[52] Appropriation is not, however, limited to the present day. The late-medieval proliferation of miniatures in visual and material culture occurred in parallel with the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century which the modern scholarship calls ”the age of transition”.[53] It was a time of change in which production and consumption were fundamentally transformed and began to take the shape of urban capitalism, secularism and individualism. Product volumes increased substantially and trade relations became global in scale.[54]

Miniaturisation was part and parcel of the change. The number and diversity of domestic artefacts grew and, for instance, dining became a performance where the setting, cutlery, dishes and dining customs ever more

differentiated. This increased the number of specialised implements and vessels offering surfaces for miniaturised ornamentation. Moreover, one of the essential characteristics of the transition was that it promoted an increasing private need for devotion and various objects related to devotional practices. Miniaturisation provided a rich visual resource for this kind of consumption, and the privately-owned imagery supported the trend towards the small-scale.[55] Significantly, for Stewart, the miniature represents closure, interiority, and the domestic.[56] It establishes an interior temporality and the space of the bourgeoisie.[57]

The miniature was also present in late-medieval items without any apparent Christian dimension such as shop signs, sculptures and ornaments used in secular architecture and toys. The latter category of objects is notably elusive since many miniaturised mundane objects, like small boats, dishes, tools and weapons cast in pewter or carved in wood, might be toys made for children or dress accessories or other kinds of amusing pieces used by adults. A case in point of the difficulties in classifying something as a toy are miniature stoneware jugs known from the Nordic countries. Some of them are considered toys, some ointment jars, and some served quite different purpose, like a small jug found under a floor tile in the medieval Dominican Convent of St Olaf in Turku in 1901. It is 6.4 cm in height and contained one hundred silver coins minted before the 1450s. This and other miniature jars might even be pilgrimage souvenirs from the grave of St Olaf in Nidaros, Norway, where they could have been filled with miraculous water from the spring of St Olaf.[58]

Miniatures are characterised by diversity and frequency and some of them even appear inside others as in the *Vierge ouvrante* motif. This makes the use of the four properties of small-scale objects, as pointed out by Knappett, quite difficult but

Figure 7. Polychrome limewood sculpture depicting the *Anna Selbdritt* motif from Luvia Church, Finland, circa 1450. Photo: ER.

Figure 8. A 15th-century dress fastener of gilt silver. The object is 1.9 cm in diameter and furnished with the *Anna Selbdritt* motif. Photo: VI.

consequently revealing. It is often impossible to define precisely the direction of the miniaturisation process. Moreover, issues such as the relationship between reliquaries and buildings, the itineraries of the medallion motif, or whether the scene on an altarpiece is a miniature set of a mystery play or the actual inspiration for a live performance; all are best understood through the concept of interaction. In fact, it appears more crucial to chart the complex networks of visual reference that the miniatures make than to determine their exact orientation. Similarly, late-medieval devotional art does not aim at some simple form of visual fidelity. On the contrary, as it pushes the viewer towards the non-natural, tracing the property of fidelity often seems to be beside the point. Moreover, depictions of miniaturised objects, carried by saints, function as their attributes, not objects as such. Similarly the child-sized Virgin beside her mother emphasises the image's devotional meaning. Crucial is not whether they are naturalistic portrayals of objects or a person, but the way miniaturisations channel devotional acts and thoughts and how their strangeness causes a puncture.

Changes in production, consumption and religious practices during the early modern period altered the lives of ever-wider social strata and their relations with objects. Scaling down had a particular role in connecting the secular with the sacred, or rather, revealing the sacred in the midst of the secular. The ontological entanglement that miniaturisations implied was also an indication of a certain late medieval understanding of materiality and the holy matter, which was an active part of any and all devotional experiences.[59] The double gesture of the technique – implying both an entanglement of the large with the small, and a disruption of the context where it appears – is pertinent for devotional art. Accordingly, the late-medieval endeavour to embed sacred art in the secular made particular use of miniaturisation. Scaled-down versions of Christian motifs as applied on private everyday articles like dress

accessories, jewellery and tableware exposed the miniatures to other forms of sensory experience as well. A small Golgotha scene depicted on a finger ring was in constant bodily contact with the person who wore the piece. It was a visual and tactile disruption of the ordinary and a constant promise of a connection with the sacred.

NOTES

1 Thompson 1956, 100–102.

2 E.g. Starkey 2005.

3 Bynum 2011, 19.

4 This article derives from a paper which the authors gave at the workshop *Histories, things, and anthropological approaches – materiality and gender in the medieval and early modern studies*, Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, Poitiers, France, 20/4/2017. We wish to thank our colleagues at the workshop as well as the anonymous reviewers of the article for their valuable feedback.

5 Colding 1956, 17.

6 Mack 2007, 47.

7 Bachelard 1969, 150.

8 Stewart 1993, 46.

9 Barthes 1993, 26–58.

10 Stewart 1993, 54, 65.

11 Stewart 1993, 43. See also Bailey 2005, 36–38; Clark 2010.

12 Since it is impossible to review the various interpretations and understandings of iconographical research here, we refer only to Erwin Panofsky's ([1932] 2012) earliest version of his theoretical thesis. For recent evaluations, see e.g. Rieber 2012; Elsner & Lorenz 2012.

13 Holly 1984, 14–15.

14 Mack 2007, 59.

15 Knappett 2012, 92.

16 Bynum 2011, 28.

17 Moxey 1996.

18 Gertsman's (2015) masterly work on Shrine Madonnas gives a complete view and relevant references on the subject. See also Gertsman 2008.

19 Gertsman 2015, 48.

20 Gertsman 2015, 50–51.

21 Gertsman 2015, 49.

22 Camille 2002, 245.

[23] On the veneration of St Anne, see e.g. Ashley & Sheingorn 1990; Nixon 2004; Kurisoo 2007; Räsänen 2009.

[24] The altarpiece from Södermanland is presently at the Historical Museum in Stockholm. A very useful database on medieval imagery in Sweden, titled *Medeltidens bilvärld*, comprises photos by Lennart Karlsson: http://medeltidbild.historiska.se/medeltidbild/visa/foremal.asp?objektid=930801A3 (accessed 20/3/2018).

[25] Aron Andersson's (1980, 154, 249) classic work presents the late-medieval wooden sculptures in Sweden.

[26] On the research history of the sculpture, see Räsänen 2007.

[27] Nordman 1965, 319.

[28] The Rode altarpiece has been the subject of active scholarship (e.g. Mänd 2009; Gertsman & Räsänen 2012), and an object of prize-winning conservation project: https://nigulistemuuseum.ekm.ee/en/on-view/on-view/rode-altarpiece-in-close-up/ (accessed 1/3/2018).

[29] Räsänen 2009, 66–67.

[30] See Karlsson 2009, 348–351.

[31] Immonen & Räsänen 2012.

[32] On the motif of Abraham's bosom, and the concept of medieval spiritual fraternity, see Baschet (2000).

[33] http://medeltidbild.historiska.se/medeltidbild/visa/foremal.asp?objektid=940829A1# (accessed 17/3/2018). A much less-known late-medieval sculpture depicting the same motif is located in a small congregation hall in Lappi, Finland (Nordman 1965, 321–322; Räsänen 2009, 129), but it has lost its figures.

[34] Gertsman 2007, 43.

[35] Panofsky 1953.

[36] Camille (2002, 245) analyses Master Francke of Hamburg's works depicting the Man of Sorrows. For recent research – also discussing the historiography around the artist-name – see Nürnberger, Räsänen & Albrecht 2017.

[37] E.g. af Ugglas 1933.

[38] On Nousiainen Church as a reliquary, see Hiekkanen 2008.

[39] Riska 1987, 237; Hirvonen 1997. At the time of writing the article, the reliquary is been analysed by Aki Arponen and Sofia Lahti as part of their respective doctoral dissertations.

[40] A dendrochronological analysis has been conducted on the object (Hiekkanen 2007, 209).

[41] Jones 2004.

[42] Dahlbäck 1987, 138.

[43] Lompolo 2017. An excellent reproduction of the figurine in Eriksson, Immonen & Hiekkanen 2017, 48–49.

[44] Nelson 1996.

[45] Nelson 1996, 118. Živilė Meškauskaitė (2015) uses the concept when analysing modern jewellery based on a byzantine Maria Orans pendant found in Kekomäki in present-day Russia.

[46] Immonen 2013.

[47] Norberg 1969.

[48] Immonen 2009, 73.

[49] Immonen 2009, 105.

[50] Mack 2007.

[51] Immonen 2009, 102–103.

[52] Nelson 1996, 123.

[53] Courtney 1997; Verhaeghe 1997; Haggrén 2009.

[54] Howell 2010.

[55] Camille 2002, 245.

[56] Stewart 1993, 70.

[57] Stewart 1993, 66.

[58] Immonen et al. 2014.

[59] Bynum 2011.

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