

Material and Immaterial Presence: Engagements with Saints before and after the Reformation in Denmark-Norway*

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Introduction

Saints were virtually omnipresent in medieval society, called upon as intermediaries between God and man in request for a future salvation. They were also considered to be friends. St. Nicholas is one saint of distinction, being friend also of the Almighty as he is repeatedly referred to as God's friend – *guds vinr* – in his saga.¹ However, before the Reformation every saint was someone to ask for help and assistance in all kinds of matters and their presence was felt in different registers. As intercessors, saints could perform miracles, appear in visions and dreams, and form the mental image serving as the locus of one's prayers and devotions. These presences were immaterial presences in as far as they were not 'things'. The saints were also materially present through pictorial and sculptural representations in churches and other buildings with public concerns. These material presences elicited a variety of interactions from the beholder: pilgrimage on feast days, devotional (pious) activities like donating to the church, recital of prayers and watching the opening and closing of the altarpieces undertaken by the clergy. In addition to the immaterial and material presence, the fact that people were named after saints also meant the saints were present as embodiments, allowing for a particularly close identification between the signified and the signifier.

Even if the promoters of the Lutheran Church put restrictions on the presence of saints in Denmark-Norway, it is difficult to tell if the people renounced their friends as swiftly as the Lutheranism commanded. Therefore, this article addresses the engagements with saints on either side of the Protestant Reformation. Rather than approaching these engagements as a traditionally upheld dichotomy between a medieval presence and an early modern absence, here people's engagements are analyzed through the concept of propinquity, as accentuating degrees of nearness. The first part of the article presents some examples of how such accentuating degrees may manifest themselves in material presences of saints, that is in the preservation, relocation and/or disempowerment of late medieval sculptures and images, while the second part looks at the development of devotional

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¹ *Heilagra manna sögur. Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder*, vol. 2, Carl Richard Unger ed., Christiania 1877, 62ff. Also see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'God's Dearest Friend: St Nicolas', in Kimberley Knight, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson & Ragnhild M. Bø eds., *The Cult of Saints in the Niðaróss Bishopric*, forthcoming.

practices including tactile piety and bodily movements described in late medieval books of hours on the one hand to the vernacular story-telling narratives and ballads featuring parts of saints' vitae from the early modern era on the other.²

Religious Change and Continuity in Denmark-Norway

The unfortunate division in historical research into a late medieval and a post-Reformation period means our understanding of the religious culture in the sixteenth century may still be considered fractional.³ However, there is a burgeoning literature addressing questions concerning change and/or continuity of religious practices and the changing senses of sacrality after the Reformation, precipitated by the quinquennial commemoration – or the *Lutherjahr* – in 2017.⁴ In this research, the role of images, other material objects and/or art are among the topics more thoroughly investigated. Attention towards the change and continuity of images of saints as well as the transformation of saints from medieval intercessors to Lutheran mirrors or *exempla* is less prominent, as is research into sixteenth-century religious songs and popular ballads.⁵

It has been argued that the decline in the cult of saints in the North was eased by the facts that there were few shrines and few sacred places.⁶ However, remnants of engagements with saints can be found all over Scandinavia also after the Reformation. The reasons for this are plentiful.

² On propinquity, see more below.

³ The unfortunate division is challenged by recent research, such as large networks like the COST Action 1031 *New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2013–2017). See e.g. Sabrina Corbellini, Mart van Duijn, Suzan Folkerts & Margaret Hoogvliet, 'Challenging the Paradigms: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Late Medieval Europe' *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 171–88.

⁴ For critical perspectives on traditional beliefs about the sixteenth-century Reformation(s) in reformed (Calvinist) countries as well as in the North, see e.g. the various essays in Peter Opitz ed., *The Myth of Reformation*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2013; Krista Kodres & Anu Mänd eds., *Images and Objects in Ritual Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Northern and Central Europe*, Cambridge Scholarly Publishing: Newcastle 2013; and Linda Kaljundi & Tuomas Lehtonen eds., *Re-forming Texts, Music, and Church Art in the Early Modern North*, Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam 2016. For essays exploring the Reformation as lived religion, see Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo eds., *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c.1300-1700*, Brill: Leiden 2017; for studies devoted to changes and continuity in devotion and worship in England and on the continent, see e.g. Andreo de Meo Arbore, 'Change and Continuity in the Display of Relics in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in James Robinson, Lloyd de Beer & Anna Hamden eds., *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, The British Museum: London 2014, 183–89 and Karin Maad & John D. Witvliet eds., *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Change and Continuity in Religious Practice*, university of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame 2004; and for discussions on how connotations of past meanings may resonate through time, see the essays in Nils Holger Petersen, Eyolf Østrem & A.Bücker eds., *Resonances: Historical Essays on Continuity and Change*, Brepols: Turnhout 2011.

⁵ A notable exception is Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature*, Stanford University Press: Stanford 1996. For examples from the Bohemian lands, see Petra Mutlová, 'The Cult of Saints in the Bohemian Reformation: The Question of Images', in O. Gecser, J. Laszlovszky, B. Nagy, M. Sebók & K. Szende eds., *Promoting the Saints. Cult and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period*, CEU Press: Budapest 2011, 283–90. For research into religious and secular sixteenth-century songs, see Judith Pollmann, '"Hey ho, let the cup go round!" Singing for reformation in the sixteenth century', in Heinz Schilling & István György Tóth eds., *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe. Religion and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1600*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2006, 294–316.

⁶ Katajala-Peltomaa 2017, 45.

Drawing on Swedish and Finnish material, Toivo suggests that customs persisted due to ‘the moderateness of the Lutheran theology, the middle ground adopted by Lutheranism, the clear social conservatism expressed by Lutherans, and obviously the wish to avoid either conflict with the establishment of neighboring denominational powers or the alienation of conservative parishioners’.⁷ As the following discussion demonstrates, Toivo’s observations are probably also valid for Denmark and Norway, even if the implementation of the Lutheran Reformation unfolded at a different pace and with differing popular enthusiasm in these four countries.⁸

Denmark-Norway was a political unit even before the Reformation as members of the Kalmar Union (1398–1534), but it was with the election of the Lutheran King Christian III in 1534 that Norway ended up as a dependency. Christian III had attended the Diet in Worms in 1521 and been exposed to Luther’s thoughts. His uncle, Christian II had converted to Protestantism and had the New Testament translated into Danish in 1524. Even if Christian II had been deposed the previous year, he continued to influence events in Scandinavia for the next decades, partly because of his ties to the House of Habsburg through his wife Isabella of Burgundy. Political unrest and conflicts between Christian II and Gustav Vasa, Fredrik I and Fredrik’s son, Duke Christian (later Christian III) prevailed until 1532. The establishment of the Reformation in Denmark in 1536 and in Norway the subsequent year, were both political – or princely – decisions, made in the wake of a civil war fought not over religious issues, but over political and social issues, a war which saw Christian III emerging as victorious.⁹

Neither Denmark nor Norway as a Danish dependency saw an immediate rupture in how the sacred was seen as present and how sacred thinking became physically manifest after the Reformation. However, the king’s religious initiatives in his Danish fiefs and the many connections between Danish and German nobility, may have better prepared continental Denmark for Luther’s theological thinking. As tradition has it, the Copenhagen mayor Ambrosius Bogbinder led an uprising in the Church of Our Lady at Christmas 1530 destroying sculptures and paintings and scolding the Catholic priests. The incident, however, if it happened, probably had to do with the disagreements between the Catholic bishop Joachim Rønnev (d. 1542) and the evangelical preaching of Hans Tausen (d. 1561), and the king’s suggestion of having a Latin mass in the church held daily and an Evangelical service held each Sunday.¹⁰ Even if controversies related to the display and use of religious images occurred at different times and on different scales in Denmark-Norway, neither of

⁷ Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2017, 102.

⁸ Ole Petter Grell, ‘Scandinavia’, in Andrew Pettegree ed., *The Early Reformation in Europe*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1992, 94–119 and Ole Petter Grell, ‘The Reformation in Denmark, Norway and Iceland’, in E.I. Kouri & Jens E. Olesen eds., *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol 2, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2016, 44–59. Olof Holm has studied the breaking of idols in Jämtland, a county belonging to Swedish ecclesiastical jurisdiction for centuries before being transferred to Trondheim in 1571. His discoveries partly resonate with, partly deviate from Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2017, cf. Olof Holm, ‘Förstörelsen av helgonbilder i reformationstidens Jämtland’, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 96 (2017), 389–419.

⁹ This is but a sketchy outline of the events. For the civil war 1534–36, the so-called *Grevens fejde*, see Grell 1992, *passim*. Also see Ole Petter Grell, ‘From Popular, Evangelical Movement to Lutheran Reformation in Denmark. A Case of Two Reformations’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 102 (2011), 33–58.

¹⁰ Anna Wind, ‘Approaching 2017: The influence of Luther in Denmark’, *Studia Theologica* 65 (2011), 115–33, at 125–26. Also see Grell 1992 and Grell 2016.

the two witnessed an iconoclasm equal to the iconoclasm in countries with Reformist (Calvinist) movements like the Netherlands or Switzerland.¹¹

More than outright iconoclasm, the most radical and enduring change noticeable for all parishioners when entering a church, would have been the removal of side altars and the relocating of statues and painted images from altars to the walls.¹² On his visitations in Zealand in Denmark, the Superintendent (Bishop) Peder Palladius (d. 1560) notes in his report that there is no need for more than one altar, the one true altar. The others, he writes, belong to ‘the false and errant teaching that popes and monks promoted for calling upon saints and the mendacious torments in Purgatory’ comparing the removal of these to Christ’s cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 21:12).¹³ According to Palladius, images were to be hung on a wall. If an image was a cult image, however, if people had flocked to it or if votive gifts were attached to it, it had to be removed and burned.¹⁴ While awaiting the removal of side altars, Palladius advises ‘you good Christians’ to ‘think about the huge misapprehension we have been subjected to under popes and monks and you ought to thank God who has freed us from that so we now know better on this Evangelical clear and bright day’.¹⁵ As it is, Palladius’s instructions are mostly concerned with cleansing the church of cultic practices, not imagery as such. The formulation concerning images in the Danish-Norwegian Ordinance from 1537/1539 also stresses this point, adding that ‘every man does indeed know that such a thing [venerating images] is nothing else than idolatry’. The Ordinance was made known in Norway on the Estates General in 1539.¹⁶

There are no records of immediate iconoclastic riots in Norway. When the Danish State Counsellor Jørgen Lykke and his entourage visited Bergen, Oslo, Skien and Trondheim in 1567, they observed a number of idolatrous practices.¹⁷ In 1568, most likely motivated by Lykke’s visit, Bergen saw something similar to an iconoclastic conflict. The Danish-born Superintendent (Bishop) Jens Skielderup (d. 1582) removed five wax statues from the high altar in the cathedral in an attempt to prompt the so-called Calvinist Second Reformation. What these five statues actually depicted is not specified, but in Skielderups statement to the chapter house they are referred to as ‘abominable

¹¹ Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious idols and violent hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1995.

¹² Iconoclasm here refers to a willfull ‘handling’ of representations of saints, that being reorganising, removal, surface damages or destruction. It is not applied as a theologically informed iconoclasm like the ones effectuated throughout the Byzantine Empire between 726–87 and 814–42 or the vandalism of all imagery associated with authorities, like the vandalism of the French Revolution, see e.g. Dario Gamboni, *Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, Reaktion Books: London 1997; David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze. Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, University of California Press: Berkeley 2005, 115–46 and Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac eds., *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, Routledge: London 2014.

¹³ Peder Palladius, *Peder Palladius’ Visitasbok*, K. Støylen ed., Forlaget Johan Grundt Tanum: Oslo 1945, 33.

¹⁴ Palladius 1945, 33.

¹⁵ Palladius 1945, 34.

¹⁶ Bente Lavold, ‘Holdninger til katolske altertavler etter reformasjonen’ in Hanne Sanders ed., *Mellom Gud og Djævelen. Religiøse og magiske verdensbilleder i Norden 1500–1800*, Nordisk ministerråd: København 2001, 155–76, at 156.

¹⁷ Lavold 2001, 159 and Anton Christian Bang, *Den norske Kirkes Historie: i Reformations-Aarhundredet (1536–1600)*, Hjalmar Biglers Forlag: Kristiania [Oslo] 1895, 54–55.

images'.¹⁸ Given that they were made of wax – and that their material substance is repeatedly specified in statements and case documents, they may have been votive gifts and as such connected to a devotional practice. If they were, the removal would have been as much a suppression of a cult practice as a ban on imagery. However, the removal led to a controversy between the bishop and the city council, ending only in 1572.

In the same year, Skielderup published a pamphlet on the topic, structured as a dialogue between a peasant (his adversaries), who comes up with more traditional Lutheran arguments, and a clergyman (the bishop himself) who defends a moderate Calvinist position, inspired by and at times quoting passages from Calvin's *Institutio religionis christianiae*.¹⁹ Ideas and views taken from the writings of the Danish theologian Niels Hemmingsen (d. 1600) also abound, but in a more indirect manner.²⁰ One example is the way Skielderup paraphrases Hemmingsen's division of images into the three categories of the *superstitiosus*, the *typicus* and the *politicus*.²¹ Of these three, Hemmingsen accepted the two latter categories, namely images to be used for typological and political purposes, while Skielderup's seems to want all three ruled out preferring words to images.²² Nevertheless, when the peasant asks if all crucifixes in churches are to be removed as well, the clergyman answers that if one must have an image on the altar, it should be a crucifix, but one has to take care that it does not develop into such misuse as there was during the reign of the pope.²³

The city council maintained their view of images, defending them not in Catholic terms as objects with a God-given power and agency, but in Lutheran (and in Hemmingsen's) terms as *adiaphora*, as 'things of indifference'. As such, images are acceptable as long as they are not invoked or worshipped. They are not to be understood as having any protective power in themselves, but they could still embody manifestations of the Christian faith.²⁴ This view on images does, however, not differ from the Catholic view of images. This view is first and foremost exemplified by the dictum of Gregory the Great (d. 604) that pictures are the books of the illiterate. Nevertheless, a note written by a wood carver and inserted into the head of a sculpted Christ in Siena in 1337 is evidence of this view also among the laity: 'In the year of our Lord January 1337 this figure was completed in

¹⁸ Bang 1895, 57.

¹⁹ Jens Skielderup, *En Christelig Vnderuisning aff den hellige Scrifft, om huad en Christen skal holde, om Affgudiske Billeder og Styttter vdi Kirckerne*, Bergen 1572. Also see Nils Gilje, "'Saa ere nu saadanne Billedstyttter døde træ oc stene." Billedstriden i Bergen 1568–1572', *Tidsskrift for kulturforskning* 10 (2011), 73–83 and Martin Blindheim, 'The Cult of Medieval Wooden Sculptures in Post-Reformation Norway', in Søren Kaspersen ed., *Images of Cult and Devotion. Function and Reception of Images in Medieval and Post-Medieval Europe*, Museum Tusulanum Press: Copenhagen 2004, 47–60.

²⁰ Anita Hansen & Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen, 'Imo licet. Omkring Niels Hemmingsens billedsyn', in *Kirkearkeologi og kirkekunst. Studier tilegnet Håkon og Sigrid Christie*, Alvheim & Eide: Øvre Ervik 1993, 181–98, at 195, n. 5.

²¹ Hansen and Bøggild Johannsen 1993, 187.

²² Skielderup 1572, 29–30. For Skielderup's relation to Luther's opponent Karlstadt, see Gilje 2011, 79.

²³ Gilje 2011, 80 and Blindheim 2004, 47.

²⁴ See Martin Luther, 'Wider die himmlischen Propheten von der Bildern und Sakrament' (1525), WA (Weimarer Ausgabe) 18, 62.84 and scholarly works on the matter by, for example Thomas Kaufmann, Joseph Leo Koerner, Andrew Spicer, Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen, and Bo Kristian Holm.

the likeness of Jesus Christ crucified Son of God living and true. And it is he one must adore and not this wood.’²⁵

The Concept of Propinquity

In her article ‘Are things “indifferent”? How Objects Change Our Understanding of Religious History,’ the historian Caroline Walker Bynum raises the question ‘If objects in fact carry a narrative of their own about change and continuity, with what theories are we to understand this?’ Scholars have, she states, recently ‘engaged in quite sophisticated discussions of “materiality” and puzzled over whether reactions to things in their physicality can be explained by cognitive or affective impulses in the brain that are universal rather than culturally particular.’²⁶ In addition to approaches from neuroscience, I would argue that approaching objects through the concept of propinquity may also prove beneficial. In an article entitled ‘Placing and Tracing Absence: A Material Culture of the Immaterial’, anthropologist Morgan Meyer argues against the application of simple dichotomies and mutually excluding definitions of the material vs. the immaterial and presence vs. absence. Rather, Meyer opts for the application of *propinquity*. In common usage ‘propinquity’ means either ‘the state of being close to someone or something’, ‘proximity’, or in a technical sense, ‘close kinship’. In a context of cultural transformation, however, propinquity refers to ‘degrees of nearness in different registers, rather than presence: a term that facilitates presence in terms of relation, analogy, nearness in time and nearness in space’.²⁷

On his theoretical outline for tracing absence, Meyer draws on research done by the archaeologist Victor Buchli. The latter has recently expanded the concept on propinquity considerably. In *An Archaeology of the Immaterial*, Buchli examines questions surrounding immateriality and the active rejection of the material world by different cultural projects with different time frames, such as early medieval asceticism and contemporary anti-consumerism.²⁸ In the late Middle Ages, he is concerned with how people responded to the so-called explosion of images, an explosion facilitated by developments in material production. Already before Luther’s Sentences and the Reformation, people had endorsed a very different understanding of materiality. Propinquity, Buchli states, was ‘challenged in terms of scale and also in terms of new technologies and the problem of their new material registers and means to effect proximity’. For example, wooden objects – among them images – may be challenged, as the assertion of their character as mere wood ‘is merely an assertion of one material register over another, and of course a recognition that multiple registers co-exist’.²⁹

²⁵ The note was found when the Crucifix was broken into pieces during the bombardment of Siena in 1944, cf. Daniele di Ludovico, *Revising Devotion: the Role of Wooden Sculptures in Affecting Painting and Devotion in the Late Medieval Period in Italy (XII-XV century)*, PhD-thesis, University of Washington: Seattle 2016, 342.

²⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Are Things ‘Indifferent’? How Objects Change our Understanding of Religious History’, *German History* 34 (2016), 88–112, at 89.

²⁷ Morgan Meyer, ‘Placing and Tracing Absence. A Material Culture of the Immaterial’, *Journal of Material Culture* 17 (2012), 103–10, at 108.

²⁸ Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of the Immaterial*, Routledge: London 2015. The book expands on a number of earlier articles and book chapters from the same author.

²⁹ Buchli 2015, 65–66.

Wood, as it is, may serve as firewood as well as a material expressing divine presence – a duality also referred to in the Bible, in Isaiah 44:11–20. Therefore, Buchli argues,

[t]he nearness and at-handedness of presence might be thought of as just one particular instance of propinquity itself. Such propinquity can be achieved in other ways, such as in terms of nearness of relation, as in kinship, nearness of analogy/association, nearness of time/immanence, or nearness in space and place – empirical presence is just one special instance and effect of a particular form of propinquity.³⁰

All these different material registers may have affected images of saints (adiaphora or not) in ways that have caused them to persist throughout the Reformation and beyond.

In Bynum’s article on indifference mentioned above, the author challenges the position of material objects as being adiaphora, asking, ‘Indeed, can objects with a religious history behind them be “things of indifference”? If vessels, altar rails, paintings and tabernacles carry with them the accretion of previous worship, can such accretions be erased by theological reinterpretation?’³¹ She finds that in theory, objects could be preserved because they could be said to be non-essential and could be constantly re-interpreted. She also mentions the increasing use in the sixteenth century of the concepts of ‘art’ and ‘ornament,’ which in their own ways helped to justify the preservation of objects otherwise thought of as popish or superstitious.³² Nevertheless, when she turns her attention to some of the preserved objects themselves – the Holy Blood altarpiece in the church of St. James in Rothenburg ob der Tauber carved by Tilman Riemenschneider around 1500–1505, and the grave Christ and the holy dresses from the convent at Wienhausen – it seems they are not really inessential or indifferent. Rather, they were kept in part because of their prestige and in part because they ‘carry with them past devotion; they create and maintain space for piety.’³³ They may also have been preserved because material registers are unstable: at different times, different aspects of propinquity have been activated, resulting in the preservation also of objects with a less uniform reception history.³⁴ The next sections of this article offer some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples from Denmark-Norway.

Images of Saints and Church Interiors after the Reformation

As demonstrated by the sixteenth-century publications of Hemmingsen, Palladius and Skielderup, the change from Catholicism to Lutheranism led to new attitudes concerning images and church decorations in Denmark-Norway. Nevertheless, as is also confirmed by their writings – although less so for Skielderup – the widely accepted dichotomy between ‘Catholic Eye and the Protestant

³⁰ Buchli 2015, 67–68.

³¹ Bynum 2016, 92.

³² Bynum 2016, 91.

³³ Bynum 2016, 111. The objects Bynum analyses are representations of Christ. She does not give any suggestions for how her analyses may be relevant for objects representing saints more broadly.

³⁴ The instability of material registers are not entirely disentangled from categories like taste and aesthetics, but these topics will not be expanded on here. See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago University Press: Chicago 1989.

Ear' cannot be upheld. The historian Bridget Heal has shown that not even in areas considered as Calvinist or Reformed may we consider the Reformation to be a purely non-visual event, while the art historian Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen has challenged the same dichotomy as well as the notion of a 'Lutheran iconography' through his work on preserved altarpieces and church interiors in Denmark.³⁵

If, as Bynum argues, the images were not *adiaphora* or things of indifference after all, the persistence of medieval objects as well as early modern objects with the same motifs is to be expected. Nevertheless, of the images made in the first decades after the Reformation, representations of Christ's Passion, and in particular, the Crucifixion, are common, while other religious imagery is rare. The continuation of the visual apparatus or motifs demonstrates a high degree of nearness with images of Christ, in particular with the image types of the *Ecce Homo* and the *Imago Pietatis*, both of which developed and flourished as motifs in the late Middle Ages in connection with new indulgences. Non-narratives like these two image types were understood as timeless and spaceless representations of Christ's suffering and thus suitable for intimate devotion.³⁶ This particular form of late medieval devotion did not only manifest itself in physical images: contemplation of the suffering Christ also left traces in religious writings from the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Indeed, Christian suffering was a common theme in Luther's theology.³⁷

Apart from Christological motifs, those most evident in post 1536/1537 artefacts are almost exclusively motifs of persons from the Bible: Adam and Eve, Moses and Aron, the Evangelists and the Apostles. These were not saints in the sense that they had been acknowledged as such by bishops or popes, but innate saints prefiguring or having acted alongside Christ. Nevertheless, one would expect that one of the first things to censure from a representation of a Biblical person was their halo, perhaps the most prominent sign of Catholic saintliness. As Wangsgaard Jürgensen has pointed out, the apostles in Agerskov church in Denmark (1632) are painted without halos, but

³⁵ Bridget Heal, 'The Catholic Eye and the Protestant Ear: the Reformation as a Non-Visual Event?' in Peter Opitz ed., *The Myth of Reformation*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2013, 321–55, at 321–22 and Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, 'The Art and Lutheran Church Decoration. Some Reflections on the Myth of Lutheran Images and Iconography' in the same volume, 356–80. Also see Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, *Art and Ritual across the Danish Reformation: Changing Interiors of Village Churches*, Brepols: Turnhout 2017.

³⁶ Michael Camille quoted Charles Caspers, saying that medieval images of the suffering Christ need not be tied to time (the mass) or place (the church), but are more temporarily and psychologically valent, cf. Michael Camille, 'Mimetic Identification and Passion Devotion in the Later Middle Ages: A Double-Sided Panel by Meister Franke', in A. A. MacDonald, B. Ridderbos & R. Schlusemann eds., *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, Egbert Forsten: Groningen 1998, 183–211, at 196–97. Also see the other essays in the same volume as well as James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: a Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Van Ghemmert Pub: Kortrijk 1979; Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Later Middle Ages in Europe*, Princeton University Press: London 1994 and Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Audience in the Middle Ages*, A.D. Caratzas: New York 1990 [1981].

³⁷ Martin Luther, 'A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg', *Luther's Works*, 43, Devotional Writings II, Gustav K. Wiencke ed., Fortress: Philadelphia 1979; Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith. Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2017. But also see Susan Karant-Nunn, "'Christians' Mourning and Lament Should not be Like the Heathens'" in John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand and Anthony J. Papalas eds., *Confessionalization in Europe 1555–1700. Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, Ashgate: Aldershot 2004, 107–29.



Figure 1: Gallery in the northern transept of Kvikne church, Norway (1739). Photo: Jiri Havran.

haloes do at times survive well into the eighteenth century. The Apostles on the gallery in Kvikne church in Norway (1739) testify to such persistence. [Fig. 1]

As far as extensive changes in church decoration did occur, Wangsgaard Jürgensen has shown that all the decorative programmes for Danish churches from the first century after the Reformation, are churches with ties to the elite, either to the king himself or to aristocrats with close connections to the court.³⁸ Minor changes and alterations were also promoted by non-nobles. In examinations of Norwegian church decoration from the sixteenth century, the presence of the elite is also perceptible in churches with objects following the image-politics and visual strategies of Lutheran Protestantism.³⁹ An altarpiece from 1591, originally situated in the stave church at Biskopsrud, is but one example [Fig. 2]. Biskopsrud belonged, as the name suggests, to the bishop's farmland until the Reformation. After the Reformation, it was incorporated into the crown land and annexed to the neighbouring Heggen church.⁴⁰ The altarpiece from Biskopsrud is composed by writing only. The sentences are taken from *Luther's Little Instruction Book* (or the *Small Catechism*) published in 1529, and were considered essential in the upbringing of the Christian church attendees. As there

³⁸ Wangsgaard Jürgensen 2016, 364–66.

³⁹ Sigrid Christie, *Norges kirker 1: Den Lutherske ikonografi i Norge inntil 1800*, Forlaget land og kirke: Oslo 1973, 21–37. Also see Lavold 2001.

⁴⁰ In Norway, all property that had belonged to bishops, chapter houses and monasteries passed to the crown in 1537, but because of lack of funds many churches were sold almost immediately. The most comprehensive sale, however, took place in the 1720s when 630 churches in southern Norway were sold. Most buyers were high officials, like members of the clergy, but some were bought by the peasantry and gentry. For the church at Biskopsrud, see Sigrid Christie & Håkon Christie, *Norges kirker: Buskerud 2*, Forlaget land og kirke: Oslo 1986, 324–25. The altarpiece is now in Norsk Folkemuseum (Oslo, NF-1814-15).



Figure 2: Altarpiece from Biskoprsrud/ Nykirke church, Norway (1591). Photo: Anne-Lise Reinsfelt, Norsk Folkemuseum.

is a similar altarpiece in Heggen (1595), the two altarpieces suggest that churches with ties to the crown were more prone to new visualities than churches with a different jurisdiction.⁴¹ Apart from the even earlier altarpiece in Gaupne (1589), similar altarpieces in churches with no direct ties to the crown date to the seventeenth century.⁴² The altarpiece in Veøy church (1625) is puzzling. Veøy church is a medieval church, dated to the thirteenth century and the altarpiece probably substituted an older one. What the earlier showed is not known. The new altarpiece is formed of a corpus and movable wings. The corpus and the inside of the wings are composed of sentences from the *Small Catechism*, while the outer side of the wings contain a painted representation of the Annunciation [Fig. 3].⁴³ Depictions of the Annunciation feature in northern medieval churches at least from the thirteenth century as one of the scenes recounting the birth of Christ on altar frontals. It is also

⁴¹ Christie & Christie 1986, 310. The one from Heggen is also at Norsk Folkemuseum (Oslo, NF-112-03).

⁴² It is difficult to draw the line – if there is one – between the royal and/or aristocratic protectors as advocates of these altarpieces and the fact that they were also the ones who could afford them.

⁴³ Dag H. Svæverud, 'Veøy kirke – 1600-tallets inventor' in Jarle Sandem ed., *Romsdalmuseets Årbok 2008: Veøy kirke*, Romsdalsmuseet: Molde 2008, 172–83.



Figure 3: Altarpiece from Veøy church, Norway (1625). Photo: Bjørn Austigard, Romsdalsmuseet.

found in a number of late medieval altarpieces. As the fest day of the Annunciation, 25 March, falls in Lent, having the story represented on the outer wings of the altarpiece meant that it would be accessible for display when the altarpiece itself was closed.⁴⁴ Having the story painted on the outer wings in Veøy almost a century after the Reformation was established testifies to a continuity of the visual culture of the past, a visual analogy. This can also be understood as a mode of propinquity, a mode in which

‘co-presence, nearness, is assembled through visual analogy akin to nearness in terms of kinship – kinship here being understood in terms of visual optical qualities such as form, colour, structure, etc. that serve as the medium of uniting, assembling, bringing together within a certain nearness and proximity two apparently irreconcilable elements.’⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See the discussion on the Annunciation on outer wings in Elisabeth Andersen, ‘Madonna Tabernacles in Scandinavia c.1150–c.1350’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 168 (2015), 165–85.

⁴⁵ Buchli 2015, 68. Buchli builds on research carried out by Barbara Maria Stafford.



Figure 4: Altarpiece from Lem church, Denmark (c. 1450, the wings repainted in 1661). Photo: Jens Bruun, www.altertavler.dk.

I would add ‘narrative convention’ to this list of visual optical qualities. Even if updated to a sixteenth-century interior, the motif of the Annunciation is structured as one where the Virgin Mary is seated in a domestic space or a *studiolo* and is reading while the archangel Gabriel appears. This narrative convention of the Annunciation was ever-present in the Middle Ages, and to that degree the Veøy altarpiece accentuates a kinship with earlier altarpieces even if the motif was not present on the former altarpiece in Veøy church itself. The haloes are gone, but the flowers symbolising the purity and love of the Virgin are preserved. The choice of motif also facilitates the bringing together of the apparently ‘irreconcilable elements’ of the Catholic Mass and the Lutheran service.

Another early example of an altarpiece with sentences and imagery combined is found in Seljord church in Norway (1588). The Ten Commandments – the most delightful sentences, as Skielderup called them in his pamphlet – are displayed on an open diptych: Moses is seen behind the one to the viewer’s left and Aron behind the other. Unlike the Annunciation-scene in Veøy, this iconography does not carry with it any nearness or kinship, as it departs substantially from what would be commonly found in church interiors in Catholic times.⁴⁶ As it is, Moses and Aron are not present in any of the late medieval altarpieces preserved in Norway, and in late medieval

⁴⁶ Christie 1973, 18–19 and 21 (illustration).

altarpieces in Denmark, they are only included as a marginal sculpture in architectural niches.⁴⁷ In Lem church in Denmark, a triptych of local production from around 1450 displays the *Pietà* with Mary Magdalene and St. John the Evangelist in its central compartment. The mid-fifteenth century paintings on the inside of the wings are lost due to the re-painting of 1661. On the left side, Moses stands presenting the Ten Commandments, while on the right side, Aron stands next to the center with the incense offering, as described in Exodus 30:6–9.⁴⁸ [Fig. 4]

The inclusion of Moses and Aron, either as protagonists in new altarpieces (Seljord) or as motifs for brushing up older altarpieces (Lem), evidences sporadic attempts to introduce a more ‘reform-friendly’ iconography also in smaller parish churches in the two countries. Juxtaposed with the Annunciation scene in Veøy, the three altarpieces indicate there were no unifying image-politics in Denmark-Norway. The phenomenon of the elite instigating ‘Lutheran iconography’ is less distinguishable in Norway than in Denmark, probably because there was less nobility in Norway and because the king was present in name only.⁴⁹

Despite the attempts to remove or at least relocate statues and paintings within the church space, many objects with representations of saints continued to adorn church interiors for a substantial amount of time after the Reformation, being replaced – if at all – only in later centuries and probably not for theological reasons.⁵⁰ The objects that did endure may have done so for other reasons. Bynum addressed the inherited prestige, for example a prestige endowed upon an object after years of patronage donations from aristocratic families.⁵¹ Outside the spheres of convents or aristocratic donations, objects as well as images of saints could also be endowed with what we may understand as cultural memory, meaning the congregations still felt related to them. As Andy Wood has pointed out for England, the Protestant assault upon the material, spiritual, financial and intellectual inheritance of the late medieval church was a national phenomenon. Nevertheless, there was also a sense that the local communities had their own rules, traditions, history and expectations and that this sense would structure their relation with material culture, as well as their relation with spiritual guidance and financial matters.⁵² For people who had recently been told to abandon their faith, let alone their friends, having a material connection and a materially constituted commitment to the past may have been reassuring. It does not, however, imply that objects depicting saints were

⁴⁷ For example there is a marginal Moses in one of the architectural niches in the Antwerp altarpiece in Roskilde Cathedral from c. 1555.

⁴⁸ Sissel F. Plahte & Jens Bruun, *Danmarks middelalderlige altertavler – og anden billedbærende kirkeudsmykning af betydning for liturgien og den private andagt*, Syddansk universitetsforlag: Odense 2010, 561.

⁴⁹ The presence/absence of the King and the networks of the Norwegian nobility are as yet in need of further research.

⁵⁰ In early modern Sweden the fear of superstition was a motive for the destruction and replacement of Catholic images, see Terese Zachrisson’s article in this volume.

⁵¹ Bynum 2016, 105.

⁵² Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2013, 92–93 and passim.

venerated but that they were considered as materially present friends, as embodiments of their reformed (Lutheran) faith.⁵³

Investing objects – an image, a person, a time, a place – with spiritual significance through viewing was an important part of people’s engagement with saints. For images and objects in churches, this would be to interact with them visually: altarpieces when opened and closed, sculptures and images when paraded, touched, kissed, dressed and/or undressed. Sometimes, for example in kissing and touching miracle-working sculptures, the laity could be involved directly, not only through their gaze.⁵⁴ However, engagements with saints before the Reformation also took place on a less public level, as tactile piety in private devotion. Examples of practices involving tactile piety in relation to prayers to saints are recorded in some of the preserved late medieval Danish prayer books, and it is to these, that I now turn.

St. Catherine, the Virgin, and Tactile Piety

Unfortunately, there are no late medieval prayer books preserved from Norway. For parish churches, the fourteenth-century inventories from Hålandsdalen (1306) and Ylmheim (1321) tell us that in addition to manuscripts such as breviaries and psalters, the churches also possessed texts related to saints. In these two churches, the texts contain stories from the life of the Virgin and the life of St. Olaf.⁵⁵ These were possibly meant to be read aloud on the feast days of each saint. These manuscripts are not preserved; neither do we have any Norwegian evidence of any supplementary devotional practices. In Danish books of hours from the sixteenth century, however, saints abound as one prayer often addresses a multitude. A telling example is the Saturday prayer to the Virgin found in manuscript AM 784, 4^o in the Royal Library in Copenhagen:

On Saturdays, one should think about the joys of Heaven and honor the Virgin Mary with all other Virgins saints, St. Catherine, St. Barbara, St. Dorothy, St. Margaret, St.

⁵³ Interestingly, the friendship between St. Nicholas and God seems to be more pronounced in the Norse translations of his vita, and it seems to decline through time in the English ones. St. Nicholas is referred to as God’s friend only once in William Caxton’s late fifteenth-century translation, see *The Golden Legend. Lives of the Saints*, William Caxton transl. from the Latin of Jacobus de Voragine, George V. O’Neill ed., Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1914, 62–71, at 63; and only referred to as ‘servant of God’ in Jacobus Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, William Granger Ryan transl., Princeton University Press: Princeton 1993, 21–27, servant or slave being more aligned with the Latin original *famulus*.

⁵⁴ See examples in the various chapters in Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan & Laura Skinnbach eds., *The Materiality of Devotion in late Medieval Northern Europe. Image, Objects and Practices*, Four Court Press: Dublin 2016 and in Kaspersen 2004.

⁵⁵ For the inventories, see *Diplomatarium norvegicum*, 21, 7 (Hålandsdalen) and Wilhelm Frimann Koren Christie, ‘Ylmheim Kirkes Inventar i det 14. Seculum’, *Urda* 2 (1842), 78–85.

Gertrude, St. Agatha, St. Othilia, St. Apollonia, St. Clare, St. Cecilia, St. Tecla, St. Concordia, St. Petronila, the 11 000 Virgins pray for us eternally. Amen.⁵⁶

The Virgin is addressed along with all saintly virgins. Thirteen of them are mentioned in particular, from the martyr virgins of the early Church to St. Clare of Assisi (d.1253). There are also examples of how material manifestations of saints merged with the religious words that were sung or spoken by effectuating images of the evoked saints' appearance. The prayers subject to analysis in this article are the ones which incorporate such tactile piety. A notable example is explained in a rubric in a book of hours belonging to a woman named Else Holgersdatter (Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS GKS 1613 4^o). The rubric describes how the devotee – it actually says 'he' – may create an image in wax 'according to the image of St. Catherine, daughter of the king of Alexandria'.⁵⁷ When the image is created, for the following thirty days one is to read fifty *Papter* [sic] *Noster* and *Ave Maria* in honour of St. Catherine.

St. Catherine was one of the more popular saints in the later Middle Ages. In artefacts made for public display she is present in more than 40 preserved altarpieces in Denmark and Norway, and mentioned in ten prayers indexed in the corpus of Danish prayer books.⁵⁸ Supporting the Christians' right not to make animal sacrifices during Emperor Maxentius' visit to Alexandria, St. Catherine is imprisoned and sentenced to death by being torn to pieces by spiked wheels. These instruments of torture are later to become her most common attribute in visual representations. The wheels, however, are smashed by an angel at the moment of the supposed execution. Refusing the emperor's marriage proposal and continuing to confess her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom, Christ, she is sentenced to death by beheading. In fact, she specifically entreats Christ at the moment of her death to answer the prayers of those who remember her martyrdom and invoke her name.⁵⁹ She is the patron saint against sudden death, as well as one evoked for help and protection by unmarried girls, apologists, archivists, educators, jurists, knife sharpeners, lawyers, librarians, nurses, philosophers, preachers, and theologians – and as one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers from the time of the plague.⁶⁰

When the thirty days of *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* described in the rubric had passed, one was supposed to transform the wax image into a candle and light it in honour of St. Catherine, pray to God a prayer of their choosing, safe in the knowledge that St. Catherine would take notice. The

⁵⁶ Author's translation. Original: Om løffuedaghen skal man tencke paa hemerigis glede ock ere iomfru Maria meth alle hellige iomfruer, sanctam Katherinam, sanctam Barbaram, sacntam Doroteam, sanctam Margaretam, sanctam Gertrudem, sanctam Agatam, sanctam Otiliam, sanctam Appoloniam, sanctam Claram, sanctam Ceciliam, sanctam Teclam, sanctam Concordiam, sanctam Pertronillam, the xi twsende iomfruer bede for oss ewindelig. Amen, cf. *Middelalderens danske bønnebøger IV*, Karl Martin Nielsen ed., Nordisk Forlag: København 1963, 377. For manuscript specifications for MS 784, 4^o, see *Middelalderenes dansk bønnebøger*, vol. 5, *Kommentar og registre*, Karl Martin Nielsen & Jens Lyster eds, Nordisk forlag: København 1982, 8–9.

⁵⁷ Author's translation. Original: æfftær sancta katerina billædæ konningens dottær aff Alexandria, cf. *Middelalderens danske bønnebøger*, vol 4. , 34.

⁵⁸ *Middelalderens danske bønnebøger*, vol 5., 124. The ratio of saints in preserved medieval sculpture is difficult to assess as we do not know how many objects there were or how many that are lost to us.

⁵⁹ There are different versions of the legend. This summary is based on Jacobus Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* written in the 1260s. See Voragine 1993, vol. 2, 334–41.

⁶⁰ For her different patron roles in various parts of Europe, see Irma-Riitta Järvinen, 'Transformations of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Finnish Vernacular Poetry and Rituals' in Lehtonen & Kaljundi eds., 2016, 421–47, at 425–28.

material engagement with St. Catherine's image is therefore what makes the prayer heard. The transformation of the wax mirrors the transformation of the devotee as the outward engagement with St. Catherine, a saint who literally lightened up her surroundings – 'more radiant than ever', as it says in her vita – also turns into an inner enlightenment.⁶¹ Another material register in this transformation from outer (material) to inner (immaterial) enlightenment is suggested in the transformation from material candle to de-materialised (evaporated) candle. This transition also echoes and points to the instability of material things made of wood described in Isaiah 44:15: 'And it hath served men for fuel: he took thereof, and warmed himself: and he kindled it, and baked bread: but of the rest he made a god, and adored it: he made a graven thing, and bowed down before it'. However, in the prayer book, the making is not the making of an idol to be adored, but the making of an object which is to be actively included in a devotional practice. In fact, investing in the material serves as a prerequisite for engaging in the immaterial.⁶²

The Virgin Mary, the most popular and venerated saint of all, is venerated in two somewhat similar practices. In one manuscript, the Virgin is the sole addressee, in another she is included in a prayer to St. Anne – like St. Catherine, another non-Biblical person. The accompanying mental image in the mind of the devotee or the accompanying illumination in the manuscript could be in the form of a St. Anne with Virgin and Child, a popular representation preserved in more than thirty Danish and Norwegian late medieval altarpieces. In the MS AM 784 4^o the devotee is asked to take six candles over the course of one year. Two candles are to be offered to the image of St. Anne, honouring her for being mother of the Virgin and grandmother to Christ; a further two candles are to be offered to the Virgin, one for role as Virgin and one for her role as mother of Christ; and finally two candles are offered to Christ for being both God and man. The six candles are to be lit when you lie prostrate, reading the following prayer. By doing this you obtain six things: the soul's wholesomeness, good reputation, good health, wisdom, joy in your heart and access to the riches of God.⁶³ In another manuscript (Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Thott 553 4^o), the devotee is encouraged, on the day of the Annunciation, to take a cord and tie one knot in it each day for an entire year, repeating as many *Ave Marias* as there are knots. By the end, it would take approximately an hour and a half to recite the accumulated number of Aves. After this one-year ritual, the devotee was supposed to fashion a candle from the cord, light it, and place it in front of an image of the Virgin while reciting all the Aves.⁶⁴

Although their use is not specified anywhere, it may be that the five wax images that the Superintendent Jens Skielderup removed from the high altar in Bergen cathedral were taken away because they were made of wax. The materiality may have been just as important as the fact that these objects represented something. Being carved in wax, they may – although there are no preserved sources of such practices in Norway – have reminded the viewer of practices of tactile piety similar to those discussed above. Propinquity comes into play here by way of analogy, an analogy which

⁶¹ Laura Skinnebach, 'Transfiguration: Change and Comprehension in Late Medieval Devotional Perception', in Laugerud, Ryan & Skinnebach eds., 2016, 90–103, at 98–99; Voragine 1993, vol. 2, 337.

⁶² See Buchli's discussion on Isaiah 44 in Buchli 2015, 107–108 and 128.

⁶³ *Middelalderens danske bønnebøger*, vol 2., 274.

⁶⁴ Laura Skinnerbach, *Practises of Perception. Devotion and the Senses in Late Medieval Northern Europe*. PhD-thesis, University of Bergen: Bergen 2013, 169.

could have been activated visually, by seeing the wax images, and somatically, recalling the bodily movements. The ‘fear’ of wax figures felt by the Church authorities is further strengthened by the fact that privately owned prayer books were preserved and used also after the Reformation as well. It should be noted, however, that even if they were objects testifying to a continuity of religious culture, they were primarily owned and used by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie – assumingly the ones more competent in differentiating between images as exempla and images as objects of veneration. The ‘fear’ may have been more lawful if directed to commoners: as exemplified by the peasant in Skielderup’s dialogue, they may have been more reluctant in viewing images as *adiaphora*.

St. Catherine, the Virgin, and Popular Ballads

The dismantling of the cult of saints was felt most concretely by the laity through the gradual loss of feast days and festive occasions and customs associated with them. Some customs did continue, like the processions with candles on the feast day of St. Lucy and the Purification (Candlemas). In his reports, Palladius includes a section devoted to feast days, which he reckons to be 73 or 74, including as many Sundays as there are weeks in a year.⁶⁵ Apart from feast days related to Christ’s birth and passion, he addresses the feast day of the angels and St. Michael and All Saints. Concerning the latter, he adds ‘When you hear about saints, you are not only to think about the Virgin, St. Peter or St. Paul [--] but also your own parents who died in the Christian faith. They are also noble saints of God, not souls in the mendacious Purgatory-torment’.⁶⁶ The sense of sacrality within each Christian individual increased, at the same time the sacrality of individual saints and corresponding feast days diminished: with lesser feast days and new monthly rhythms the Protestant Reformation in Denmark-Norway did not only denote a theological divide, but also a socio-cultural transformation.⁶⁷

When engagements with saints could no longer be manifest as devotions, where did devotions go? Thomas DuBois has pointed out that ‘Ballads and sayings preserved elements of old devotions’.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, DuBois does not qualify this argument any further. Turning not to late medieval prayer books, but to popular ballads, the following examples demonstrate that there are instances where the *vitae* of the saints – known to people of the North from the early fourteenth century not only as texts read in churches, but also as prose hagiography – were transformed into

⁶⁵ Palladius 1945, 137.

⁶⁶ Palladius 1945, 143.

⁶⁷ Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* in its various editions, the subsequent critical comments as well as support is a case in point here. See the historiographical overview in Alexandra Walsham, ‘The Reformation and “The Disenchantment of the World” Reassessed’, *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 497–528. For the permanent number of feast days in Norway before the Reformation, see Audun Dybdahl, *Helgener i tiden*, Tapir: Trondheim 1999, 17. The question ‘Why did people choose the Reformation?’ also addresses cultural changes, cf. Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2005.

⁶⁸ Thomas DuBois, ‘Introduction’. in Thomas DuBois ed., *Sanctity in the North. Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2008, 3–28, at 23–24.

tropes in ballads and folk tales.⁶⁹ As it happens, the prayers involving tactile piety of the Danish prayers books were prayers directed to the Virgin and to St. Catherine. Some other saints, such as St. Olaf and St. Knut, are included in the corpus of medieval and early modern ballads, but the only female saints mentioned are the two we are now familiar with.

There are no songs about St. Catherine preserved from Catholic times. The oldest version in the Nordic countries is Danish, from the eighteenth century. Here, she is actually referred to as St. Karen and the narration of her life is closer to the Catherine legend than later versions. In later versions, her name is de-sanctified and she appears in the ballads as Little Karen in Denmark (Liden Karen) and Little Kari in Norway (Liti Kari). There is no known ‘original ballad’, but the extensive use of ballad forms have made most scholars believe the song developed in the North in medieval times, slowly changing content and narrative structure in the subsequent centuries. The fact that it has a pan-Nordic structure, four lines in the verse and no chorus (which is also the case with French and German versions) adds credence to the possibility that the song originated in a pre-Reformation context.⁷⁰

The first stanza situates the relation between Kari and the Emperor:

O, Little Kari served
In the young king’s court
She shone like a star
Among all the maidens⁷¹

The opening lines describe Kari not as the daughter of the king of Alexandria, but as a servant at a young king’s court. Her beauty, however, is highlighted according to the legendary tradition, and the emphasis put on the king’s age as ‘young’ is probably an attempt to mirror this beauty. Hence Kari or St. Catherine’s moral superiority is underlined by her refusal to wed not only a young, but also a handsome earthly ruler, who promises her what was considered to be the most important position for a woman. As the song unfolds, some details from the vita are actually preserved, like the instruments of torture, although the spiked wheels are altered to a spiked barrel.⁷²

Listen, Little Kari
If you don’t want to be mine

⁶⁹ Pil Dahlerup, *Dansk litteratur. Middelalder 1 Religiøs litteratur*, Gyldendal: København 1998, 143–51. This is, however, a general assumption. It may also have happened during the Middle Ages, and then altered after the Reformation to fit the new devotional ideals. Also see Maad & Witvliet 2004 (as in note 2).

⁷⁰ As Dahlerup notices in her chapter on saints and ballads, ‘Reformationen har formodentlig ryddet grundigt ud i netop denne visetype’, meaning the type is scarcely represented in the surviving corpus, see Dahlerup 1998, 200. For the Danish history and reception of the ballad, see Svein Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, vol 2., Gyldendal: København 1856, 543–52. Also see Hanne Weisser, *Folkevisenes fortællinger*, Olifant forlag: Oslo 2011, 69 and 168.

⁷¹ Author’s translation. Original: ‘Å lisle Kari tende i unga kongens går, ho lyste som en sjærna blant alle tærnur små’, see Weisser 2011, 169.

⁷² Future research may reveal if the alteration is based on developments on torture processes in local jurisdictions.

I will let you in the spiky barrel
And push it around⁷³

The outcome of this torment is not specifically stated in the same way as in the legend. Rather, the angels destroying the spiked wheels are conflated with the doves in the last stanza, which tells how Kari is taken by two doves to the mighty heaven above, while the emperor was taken by two ravens directly to hell:

Then came two white doves
From heaven above
They took Little Kari
And then they were three

Then came two ravens
Up from hell beneath
They took the young king
And then they were three⁷⁴

The medieval devotees of St. Catherine would petition her to reduce their time in Purgatory. As there is no mentioning of the Purgatory in the Bible, it therefore does not feature in Protestant teaching and Lutheran theology holds that the individual Christian's faith alone determines if the person may enter heaven or not. The stanza does not challenge the reformed theological doctrine of death leading one to either heaven or hell, the ones who have obtained the grace of faith goes to heaven and the others not. When performing the ballad, people did not ask for St. Catherine's help to shorten their time in Purgatory, but they may have felt a desire to be as steadfast in their virtues as Kari (or, in other words, St. Catherine). Kari, then, would be present not only as saint-lore but also as a moral exemplum, the latter endowing the saint as the subject of a ballad with the same presence as that of a saint preserved in the form of a sculpture or an image in a church.

We do not know much about how the listener, performer or participant would have related to the story told by the ballad.⁷⁵ However, the one who performed or participated in the song – and perhaps accompanying movements – would materialise, not in a physical manner, but as an embodied engagement, a relatedness which may be understood as 'torque', as torsion.⁷⁶ Buchli outlines the

⁷³ Author's translation. Original: 'Å hør du lisle Kari, vi du kje vera mi, så leg eg deg i spikertona in, å trilar den om kring', see Weisser 2011, 169.

⁷⁴ Author's translation. Original: 'Det kom tvo kvite duvur alt I frå himlen ne, dei tok ho lisle Kari å snart så blei der tre' and 'Så kom der tvo svarte korpar did up frå helvede, dei tok nå unge kongen å snart så va det tre', see Weisser 2011, 169.

⁷⁵ For Finland and Latvia, see the four essays under the heading 'Music and Religious Performances' in Lehtonen & Kaljundi eds., 2016, 123–250. For Norway, the newly established research project *Norwegian Broadside Ballads, 1550–1950: recovering a cultural heritage* at the NTNU, Trondheim will probably provide novel and valuable insights.

⁷⁶ Buchli 2015, 18. Buchli adopts the 'torque' from Geoffrey Gat Harpham and his discussion on torque and speech in, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, The Chicago University Press: Chicago 1987.

advantage of defining a bodily engagement as such ‘The “torque” metaphor is useful as it rejects a sense of metaphysical immanence and acknowledges that it is people who perform this torque [--]. Further, torsion implies continuous exerted action; one does not just twist (that is, act) once, but one does so in an exerted, sustained fashion. It is a continuous, sustained and repeated exertion which produces the torque effect.’⁷⁷ The engagement as torque is not necessarily one of nearness in time and space, but propinquity may still be felt as nearness to the ballad’s theme, nearness in the sense of the ballad serving as a locus for identification with the protagonist.

In contrast to the prayer books which may have been unfamiliar to most common people, singing and dancing would not. In fact, singing is encouraged by the early reformers, not least by Martin Luther. Palladius is among the Lutheran clergymen strongly recommending it:

You are not only to sing there [in the church], but also at home, in forest and land, in fields and meadows, everywhere where it is fit; the woman when weaving, the girl at the spinning wheel, she would have produced a skein in no time if continuously singing holy songs. It is better [to sing holy songs] than singing lewd songs and slander when you are two or three together, or if you are by yourself, thinking evil thoughts.⁷⁸

Singing is the fourth of the deeds Palladius lists as important in order to successfully worship according to the New Covenant, which here donates the Lutheran faith, ‘what we call *sacrificium laudis et gratiarum actionis*’.⁷⁹ Palladius does not give any example of a ‘holy song’, but he does mention parishes singing beautifully, such as the community of the island of Møn.

A variety of ballads relates to the Virgin. There are ballads on the infancy of Christ, and ballads containing references to the Virgin as a saint.⁸⁰ In the ballad *Jesusbarnet, Stefan og Herodes* [The Christ Child, Stephen, and Herod], the Virgin is described in the same way as she is often portrayed, as the Queen of Heaven – or Empress as she is called in the ballad:

A Virgin pure has sprung up
A rose above all women
She is the fairest, in the world she is
She is called the Empress of Heaven⁸¹

Her omnipotence and omnipresence is often surprisingly intact given that she was one of the most harshly attacked figures by the reformers.⁸² Her persistence as a spiritual friend is also evidenced by the fact that there are no written records of Marian ballads from before the eighteenth century – an evidence of two centuries of oral/aural traditions. One example of the persistence of her presence

⁷⁷ Buchli 2015, 19.

⁷⁸ Palladius 1945, 79.

⁷⁹ Palladius 1945, 80.

⁸⁰ See the chapter on Marian songs in Dahlerup 1998, 151–91.

⁸¹ Author’s translation. Original: ‘En Jomfru ren oprunden er, en Rose over alle Kvinder: hun er den væneste, i Verden er, hun kaldes Himmels Kejserinde’, see Dahlerup 1998, 189.

⁸² Dahlerup 1998, 189.

is found in a ballad about St. George (although he is not mentioned by name), written down in south-eastern Norway in 1863. Having fought the dragon and saved the king's daughter, he is offered both the princess and half the kingdom in reward, but St. George refuses the offer, answering the king as follows:

Keep your silver and your gold for yourself
 Thereto your kingdom
 I have promised my services to the Virgin Mary
 I will never fail to serve her⁸³

St. George dismisses the vanity and transitoriness of silver and gold as well as a kingdom, preferring to dedicate himself to the service of the Virgin Mary – even in a ballad that is otherwise stripped of association with the original saint's legend (as the saint is not mentioned by name).

A ballad written down in 1857 at the same farm as the one about the knight and the dragon, entitled *Fuglen site på lindekvist* [The bird sat down on a linden branch] tells the story of Tora liti who receives from a bird a message about her death at young age. She finds it strange to be chosen to die early as she is in good health and is engaged to an English prince. However, she succumbs to the prophecy, and is met by the Virgin at the entrance to heaven. The first stanza in this 1857 account tells us that the bird is singing about the blessings of the Virgin and her son:

The bird sits on a linden branch
 God rule [the world]
 It sings so much about Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ
 God sends out his grace⁸⁴

Manuscripts of the ballads from other parts of Norway, however, have no mention of the Virgin in the first stanza, like this one from 1863:

The bird sits on a linden branch
 Let God rule [the world]
 It sings so beautifully about Jesus Christ
 God sends out his grace⁸⁵

⁸³ Author's translation. Original: 'Hav du sjave ditt sylv å ditt gull; Å dertil ditt kongerikji; Eg hev hæna jomfru Maria mi teneste sett; Eg må hæna alli svike', see *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad* (TSB) B 10, 'St Georg og draken', *Norske Mellomalderballader: Legendeballader*, Nasjonalbiblioteket/bokselskap.no: Oslo

⁸⁴ Author's translation. Original: 'Fuglen site på lindekvist; Gud råde; Han synge så mykje om jomfru Maria å Jesum Krist; Herre Gud sender ut sin nåde', see the version at Dokumentasjonsprosjektet, http://www.dokpro.uio.no/ballader/tekster_html/b/b022_008_fnote.html, (29 May 2017).

⁸⁵ Author's translation. Original: 'Fuglen site på lindekvist; Lat Gud råde; Han synge so vent om Jesum Krist; Herre Gud sende oss sin nåde', see TSB B 22, 'Fuglen sette seg på lindekvist', *Norske Mellomalderballader: Legendeballader*, Nasjonalbiblioteket/bokselskap.no: Oslo 2015, http://www.bokselskap.no/boker/legendeballadar/tsb_b_22_fuglen, (28 May 2017).



Figure 5: Altarpiece from Kvernes stavechurch, Norway (mid-17th century incorporating late medieval statues. Photo: O. Værnes, Romsdalsmuseet.

There are different endings for the ballad as well, but even if their wording is not exactly identical, the moral of the ballad is always that the Virgin Mary appears and that any young girl should conduct herself with humility, as Tora did.

As with the ballad about St. George, the ballad recounting the story of Tora and the Virgin, emphasizes the eternal grace of heaven contrasted with the perishable pleasures on earth. Although Tora is no saint, she is a virgin, and as such is chosen to enter the glory of heaven. In content, the ballad therefore echoes the many legends about virgin martyrs in prose hagiography. The different versions of the ballad, however, may reveal local controversies about the Virgin's presence. Could the Mother of God be sung about in the same way as her son, or could she only be put on stage in minor roles? If there were controversies about the Virgin's presence in religious and popular songs,

we may assume that there were others controversies as well, for example concerning representations of her in paintings and sculpture.⁸⁶

Concluding remarks

Although the presence of saints was indisputable in medieval times, the modes in which they were present did cause controversy. Theologians discussed, for example, whether the Archangel Gabriel's appearance to the Virgin was understood by her to be the actual physical embodiment of an angel or an intellectual vision.⁸⁷ However, even if one differed between forms of visions and holding spiritual and intellectual visions to be more significant than corporeal visions or physical presences, all were valid as materializations of the divine. In general terms, the nearness and at-handedness of the medieval divine, present either as visions, miracles, artefacts or relics, were reconfigured during the Reformation. In principle, the implementation of the Reformation and Lutheran theology gave prominence to the word (Scripture) over image and prominence to grace (Gratia) over merits. The different attitudes to presence and materiality, however, were not only a result of the new faith. Parallel developments in the printing press, the *camera obscura* and the science of optics also contributed to the new sense of the material – and thus also of the immaterial.⁸⁸ Miracles and visions of saints in all forms ceased in the same way as their role of intercessors did and their relics, paintings and sculptures lost their agency.

Nevertheless, people were still named after saints, preserving the identification between the signified and the signifier.⁸⁹ Also, as cautiously suggested in this article, addressing saints with the concept of propinquity, or degrees of nearness, can elucidate some of the ways people might have engaged with them in times betwixt and between. The Virgin Mary and St. Catherine are but two examples of former saintly protagonists whose unquestionable agency-empowered presence, found as mental images, statues or objects created through tactile piety in the Middle Ages transformed into a subsequent agency-disempowered presence as not-to-be-venerated images after the Reformation. However, through vernacular imagination, an immaterial presence became manifest when words previously uttered in religious contexts were re-uttered and remembered as saint-lore in ballads. As was sometimes the case with Catholic prayers, these ballads were performed not only with song, but also with dance and bodily movements. In the same way as some sculptures and paintings of saints re-used in altarpieces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries served not as agents or loci of cults, but as exempla and undeniable parts of sacred space [Image 5], a vocalized counterpart of these sculptures and paintings would be the ballads sung and enacted with relatedness to

⁸⁶ This topic remains to be explored in detail. For the role of the Virgin in post-Reformation Germany, see Bridget Heal, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany. Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500–1648*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2014. Also see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580*, Yale University Press: New Haven 2005 [1992], 377–477.

⁸⁷ Janet Martin Soskice, 'Sight and Vision in Medieval Christian Thought', in Teresa Brennan & Martin Jay eds., *Vision in Context. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, Routledge: London 1996, 29–43.

⁸⁸ Buchli 2015, 64ff.

⁸⁹ Audun Dybdahl, 'Navneskikken i Trøndelagsregionen i senmiddelalderen. Personnavnforrådet i lys av helgenkulten', *Maal og Minne* 2 (2008), 111–41.

and a recollection of earlier vocal and tactile piety – the saints’ alleged power possibly lingering on between the lines.

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