German History Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 88–112

REFLECTION

Are Things 'Indifferent'? How Objects Change Our Understanding of Religious History*

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I: The Paradox of Protestant 'Survivals'

I begin with a paradox. Our best evidence for the use of medieval religious art—that is, what most of us would think of as 'Catholic' art—survives in Protestant Germany. In Saxony and Lower Saxony alone, 545 medieval altarpieces survive in their churches; Mecklenburg has another 165.[1] There are more medieval mass chalices extant today from northern Germany than from anywhere else; the number may exceed 1000. Winged altars, rood screens, embroidered frontals and other church furnishings have also been preserved there in large numbers, often in their original liturgical settings.[2] The richest collection of medieval chasubles is found in Lutheran Germany, and many more survive in Lutheran churches in Hungary and Poland.[3] Such chalices, altar linens and altarpieces are not, for the most part, preserved in display cases; they are used

* An early version of this paper was presented as the James Field Willard lecture at the University of Colorado at Boulder on October 23, 2014. I am grateful to Profs. Scott Bruce and Anne Lester for the invitation to Colorado and to the many helpful suggestions I received at the conference on 'Medieval Materiality' that followed on October 24 and 25. I also thank Richard Kieckhefer, Denise Koller, Guenther Roth, and two anonymous readers for *German History* for valuable suggestions. As always, I am grateful to Jeffrey Hamburger and Henrike Lähnemann for guiding me through materials from the Lüneburg cloisters and for their wide-ranging researches in the archives and libraries of the region.

[1] See J.M. Fritz, 'Vorwort' and 'Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums . . .', in J.M. Fritz (ed.), *Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums: Mittelalterliche Kunstwerke in evangelischen Kirchen* (Regensburg, 1997), pp. 7–18, and J.L. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago, 2004), p. 67. On the general question of Protestant survivals, see the various essays in *Die bewahrende Kraft*; Justin E.A. Kroesen, *Seitenaltäre in mittelalterlichen Kirchen: Standort—Raum—Liturgie* (Regensburg, 2010), pp. 17 and 28; J. Hamburger, 'Am Anfang war das Bild: Kunst und Frauenspiritualität im Spätmittelalter,' in F. Eisermann, E. Schlotheuber and V. Honemann (eds), *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.–26. Febr. 1999* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 1–43, here pp. 3–5; A. Spicer, 'Introduction: Lutheran Churches and Confessional Identity', in A. Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, Surrey, 2012), pp. 1–15; E. Wetter, '"On Sundays for the laity . . . we allow mass vestments, altars and candles to remain": The Role of Pre-Reformation Ecclesiastical Vestments in the Formation of Confessional, Corporate and "National" Identities', in Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*, pp. 165–95 and S.C. Karant-Nunn, 'Afterword', in Spicer, *Lutheran Churches*, pp. 483–91, here pp. 485 and 488. Pietism and the Enlightenment destroyed more medieval art in Germany than did the Reformation.

[2] Fritz, 'Vorwort' and 'Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums', pp. 7, 10, 17.

[3] E. Wetter, 'Introduction', in E. Wetter (ed.), *Iconography of Liturgical Textiles in the Middle Ages* (Riggisberg, 2010), pp. 7–15. A number of these vestments have been altered. See also Wetter, '"On Sundays"' and Margit Thøfner, 'Framing the Sacred: Lutheran Church Furnishings in the Holy Roman Empire', in Spicer, *Lutheran Churches*, pp. 97–131, here pp. 126–28.

 doi:10.1093/gerhis/ghv145

in ritual. Whereas in Catholic regions of southern Germany, medieval religious art and liturgical furnishings have often been plastered over by baroque ornamentation or removed entirely from sanctuaries, sometimes sent to museums or storage in church basements, sometimes reused or sold, Protestant Germany is rich in medieval church decoration. The treasury of the cathedral of Halberstadt and the former Cistercian abbey of Bad Doberan, with its well-preserved architecture and liturgical furnishings, are particularly good examples of the long life of Catholic objects in Protestant Germany. Indeed, the best place for a modern historian to see the setting of medieval ritual—that is, to find devotional objects where they can be documented to have been in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—is in the Lutheran women's foundations of the Lüneburg Heath south-east of Hamburg, on which I have recently been doing research.[4]

This paradox raises three large historiographical questions, which have become more insistent for me the more I have worked on German religious foundations. First, the paradox itself begs the question 'why?' Why are the consequences of Lutheranism in such contrast to the iconoclasm of early modern Calvinism? It seems quite counter-intuitive that the Lutheran emphasis on the word and The Word should prove conducive to the preservation of the visual, that is, of the work and 'works' of human hands. Second, does the survival—indeed the preservation—of objects necessitate a chronology of medieval and early modern religious and cultural history different from that which we usually find in textbooks? In other words, do objects suggest that we should be situating the coming *Lutherjahr* of 2017 in a very different way from the conventional focus, implied by the study of theological texts, on break and breakthrough in 1517? Third, if objects in fact carry a narrative of their own about change and continuity, with what theories are we to understand this? Although art historians, scholars of religion and anthropologists have 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, European historians, long accustomed primarily to textual evidence, may find such considerations confusing and new.[5] I turn briefly to each of

[4] The six Lüneburg cloisters are: Ebstorf, Isenhagen, Lüne, Medingen, Walsrode and Wienhausen. There are seventeen cloisters and foundations supervised by the Klosterkammer Hannover. See 'Klosterkammer Hannover', retrieved on 15 April 2014, from http://www.klosterkammer.de/html/kloester_stifte.html. The modern term for such foundations, *Damenstift*, is not a medieval or Reformation term.

[5] See B. Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), pp. 1–22; L. Daston (ed), *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (New York, 2004); D. Miller (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham, NC, 2005); E. Arweck and W. Keenan (eds), *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual* (Oxford, 2006); W. Keane, 'The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 14 (2008), pp. 110–27; A. Dierkens, G. Bartoleyns and T. Golsenne (eds), *La performance des images* (Problèmes d'histoire des religions, 19, Brussels, 2010); D. Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London, 2010); C.W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011); and C.W. Bynum *et al.*, 'Notes From the Field: Materiality', *The Art Bulletin,* 95 (2013), pp. 11–37. The caveats of T. Ingold are apposite; see T. Ingold, 'Materials Against Materiality', *Archaeological Dialogues,* 14 (2007), pp. 1–16. I have discussed this further in C.W. Bynum, 'The Sacrality of Things: An Inquiry into Divine Materiality in the Christian Middle Ages', *The Irish Theological Quarterly,* 78 (2013), pp. 3–18, especially nn. 1–2; and C.W. Bynum, 'Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology, Or, Why Compare?' *History of Religions,* 53 (2014), pp. 341–68, especially 353–54 and 363–64.

these larger questions before dealing with several specific examples from my own area of research that illustrate the conundrums at stake.

To come first to the fact of Protestant preservation. Perhaps partly because there has been so much attention recently by art historians and others to the iconoclasm of the sixteenth century, which targeted material objects such as vestments or altars and altar rails as well as what we call 'art', the survival in Protestant lands comes as a surprise. Historians writing in English have tended to focus on the destruction of statues, glass and altarpieces by Calvinists, especially the seventeenth-century English Puritans, and on the tendency to replace image with word, a trend that was recently explored in the exhibition at the Tate Gallery *Art Under Attack*.[6] Indeed, there was so much destruction of small devotional sculpture in England that the exhibition of English alabasters from the Victoria and Albert Museum that recently toured the United States was perforce made up almost exclusively of examples from the continent.[7] We know that Ten Commandment Tables often came in English Protestant churches to substitute for figural images, so that the textual quite literally replaced the visual.[8] Anglophone historians of the continental Reformation have also paid much attention to Calvinist iconoclasm.[9] Even from the history of the Lutheran Reformation in German lands, it is worth noting that the earliest new church built under Lutheran auspices (the Castle Church of Torgau built in the 1530s) is stark, with white walls and a simple altar table.[10] As one would expect in a religion that emphasized reception of the word as salvation, the only furnishing with elaborate decoration is the pulpit. And yet, medieval religious art and objects survive best in German Protestant lands—a survival that led, certainly by the early twentieth century and probably earlier, to a historicist yet paradoxical commitment to preservation of a heritage that went back well before the emergence of Protestantism.

[6] T. Barber and S. Boldrick (eds), *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm* (Catalogue of exhibition at Tate Britain, 2 Oct. 2013 to 5 Jan. 2014; London, 2013). Figure 46 on p. 64 in R. Williams, 'Reformation', in Barber and Boldrick, *Art under Attack*, pp. 48–73, from the Priory Church of St Mary and the Holy Cross in Binham, England, is an especially striking example. For a general account of Reformation iconoclasm, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2012), pp. 252–54. It is worth noting that religious images did not disappear in England; much religious art was transferred to, and/or imitated in, private houses and even taverns; see U. Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 167.

[7] Among other venues, the exhibition 'Object of Devotion: Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum', organized by Art Services International, was at Bowdoin College in 2011, at the Kalamazoo Institute of Art in 2012, the North Carolina Museum of Art in 2013, and the Museum of Biblical Art in New York from 7 March to 8 June 2014. For a review that stresses the iconoclastic reaction, see K. Johnson, 'So Potent, They Were Fated to Be Smashed', *The New York Times* (29 May 2014), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/arts/design/object-of-devotion-an-exhibition-of-alabaster-sculptures.html?_r=0

[8] For examples, see J.F. Hamburger, *Script as Image* (Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts, 21, Paris, 2014), p. 58, fig. 39; and Williams, 'Reformation', figs. 34 and 35, pp. 50–5. The panel now from Roggenstede, which was in Dornum before 1683 and is reproduced in Hamburger, *Script as Image*, is an especially telling example. The words of institution of communion make a chalice-shaped object in the centre with a round host-like object above and the Ten Commandments surrounding them. Although made up of text, the image makes its initial impact as visual, not textual.

[9] C.M.N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986) and L.P. Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (Cambridge, 1995).

[10] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, p. 406, fig. 197, and Thøfner, 'Framing the Sacred', pp. 94–104.

A number of explanations can be given for this survival of medieval religious objects in situ. Some would stress fortuitous factors such as the fact that many German areas went back and forth between Lutheranism and Catholicism and were thus for a long time not settled enough or rich enough for wholesale church renovation or redecoration.[11] Lack of funds protected medieval liturgical vessels, wall decoration and the church fabric itself from damaging renewal. Such slowness of reaction was probably also aided by the fact that what we would call 'artistic' taste was generally conservative in German lands. Moreover, wealthy aristocratic and patrician families prided themselves on their gifts of objects as well as landed property to local religious houses. Pride in such establishments led to a desire to preserve them, and the display they represented, in some form after the Reformation. The increasing use in the sixteenth century of the concepts of 'art' and 'ornament' also helped to justify retaining objects that might otherwise have seemed popish or superstitious.[12] In the case of the Protestant women's foundations on which I have been working, we should note the extraordinary number of houses for nuns and canonesses in medieval northern Germany, their relative wealth, their utility as a placement for supernumerary women from the upper classes and their political connections.[13] As Jeffrey Hamburger has suggested, perhaps more survived because there was more there in the first place.[14]

Nonetheless, such observations do not explain the absence of efforts to remove objects such as altars, reliquary statues, devotional plaques and lavish vestments that could be understood as representing a degenerate 'religion of works'. The most general and frequently found explanation for what a recent volume has called 'the preserving power of Lutheranism' is theological: Luther's doctrine of *adiaphora* or 'indifference'. [15]

A bit of explanation will be helpful here both because the doctrine may be unfamiliar and because it immediately raises the second and third questions implied in our paradox. When Martin Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522 after his sequestering at the Wartburg, he found that some damage had been wreaked on church art under the leadership of the reformer, Andreas Karlstadt. Horrified and, as recent research suggests, exaggerating the destruction, he argued against such actions.[16] Iconoclasm is objectionable, he said, exactly *because* no one really believes a statue is God. Objects

[11] Although it would be unwise to enter into a discussion here of the large literature on confessionalization, this paper has clear implications for our understanding of the lability of evangelical and even Lutheran identity. To consider that would necessitate discussing at length the new art produced under Lutheran auspices.

[12] Spicer, 'Introduction', p. 4, and Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, p. 59.

[13] For bibliography, see n. 5 above and n. 40 below. The goal of providing for daughters and widows was not the only reason for survival. Piety continued. See W. Brandis, 'Quellen zur Reformationsgeschichte der Lüneburger Frauenklöster', in Eisermann *et al.*, *Studien und Texte*, pp. 357–91, here pp. 359–60, and M. Wiesner-Hanks and J. Skocir (eds and trans.), *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany* (Reformation Texts with Translation [1350–1650], Milwaukee, 2004).

[14] Hamburger, 'Am Anfang', p. 4. On the general importance of women's foundations, especially the houses of canonesses that the north German convents in some ways resembled, see R. Suckale, *Die mittelalterlichen Damenstifte als Bastionen der Frauenmacht* (Kölner Juristische Gesellschaft, 25, Cologne, 2001).

[15] G. Wartenberg, 'Bilder in den Kirchen der Wittenberger Reformation', in *Die bewahrende Kraft*, pp. 19–33. See also Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, p. 157.

[16] N. Krentz, 'Auf den Spuren der Erinnerung. Wie die 'Wittenberger Bewegung' zu einem Ereignis wurde', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 36, 4 (2009), pp. 563–95, and N. Krentz, *Ritualwandel und Deutungshoheit* (Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation, 74, Tübingen, 2014), pp. 234–38.

are things of indifference. While it would be better to do without them, simple people who need them should not be scandalized or indeed led by the animus against images to attach to them too much importance. If images and objects, altars and church buildings, instruct the devout and provide space for the practice of religion and the hearing of the word, they do no harm, precisely because no sacrality inheres in them. Religious pictures are neither holy nor unholy; they are non-essential, merely there to be used.

What Luther understood over the next few years by 'things of indifference', and the implications of the idea for Protestant material culture in the mid-sixteenth century, are complicated matters.[17] While forbidding what he understood as idolatrous images, such as those of the Virgin Mary, and criticizing extravagant church decoration, Luther's writings on the question of images were occasioned by events rather than programmatic.[18] Moreover, the idea of *adiaphora* led almost immediately to controversy among Protestants, who disagreed about which practices might be indifferent or non-essential. Indeed, the fact that the next two hundred years saw more than one adiaphorist controversy suggests the inherent difficulties in the concept.[19] But what concerns me here is less what Luther meant or what happened immediately in Protestant areas than the way historians have used the concept to explain 'the preserving power of Lutheranism'. For whatever support the idea of *adiaphora* may have given to theologians who wished, for complex reasons, to preserve or allow certain objects or practices by arguing that they are neutral or reinterpretable, it is counter-intuitive to think that the visual and what art historians call the 'haptic' (that is, bodily or tactile or somatic) impact of things can be so easily neutralized or changed.[20] One might even question whether 'preservation' or the often-used word 'survival' is an appropriate description when active interaction with objects continues.

It is, of course, extremely difficult (even where textual evidence exists) to discover the intentions with which the creators and patrons of images or church ornaments make them or the responses the devout bring. But it is, nonetheless, hard to accept the idea that religious materials are themselves inert, indifferent or non-essential, waiting for words from the pulpit or Sunday School to imbue them with meaning or alter their meaning. The doctrine of indifference did allow Lutherans to retain objects by asserting new meanings for them, but it hardly seems a very good description of what people actually saw. Are objects indifferent until interpreted by preachers and theologians? 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? Whatever

[17] See the essays in Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*.

[18] See Margarete Stirm, *Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation* (Gütersloh, 1977), pp. 17–68, and S.R. Havsteen, 'Lutheran Theology and Artistic Media: Responses to the Theological Discourse on the Visual Arts', in Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*, pp. 221–40, here pp. 221–3. Havsteen gives full bibliography in n. 1 p. 221.

[19] On the adiaphorist controversies, see the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/5921/adiaphorism (accessed 17 Feb. 2015), and Markus Friedrich, 'Orthodoxy and Variation: The Role of Adiaphorism in Early Modern Protestantism', in R.C. Head and D. Christensen (ed.), *Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Early Modern Culture: Order and Creativity 1550–1750* (Studies in Central European Histories, 42, Leiden, 2007), pp. 45–68.

[20] On the haptic quality of medieval art, see J. Jung, 'The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination', in C. Hourihane (ed.), *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History* (Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers, 11, Princeton, 2010), pp. 203–40.

Luther and Melancthon said from the pulpit about confirmation or extreme unction (and they differed on whether such rites should be allowed), the rites and their sacramental materials were embedded in a long history of worship the objects seemed to carry with them. While it may prove possible to date the emergence of certain powerful new interpretations in the sermons and commentaries of these theologians, the faithful sometimes worshipped in front of altarpieces that featured images of the saints carrying as their attributes chalices and other vessels that conveyed very different understandings of objects and rituals. Thus, however much the popular press and tourist offices may wish to date 'the coming of the Reformation' in Germany in order to have an anniversary year to celebrate, scholars such as James Simpson, David Aers and Thomas Lentes have argued with increased insistence that there is no clear break between medieval and early modern. The study both of Protestant enthusiasm for certain objects and of late medieval ambivalence about them has been a major factor in reinterpretations of chronology that stress the slowness of cultural change.[21]

The theory of religious objects as indifferent not only runs counter to historians' recent emphasis on the slow pace of change; it is also at odds with much theorizing of art and material culture by art historians and anthropologists.[22] Ever since the appearance of David Freedberg's ground-breaking and extremely influential book *The Power of Images* in the late 1980s, discussion of art has assumed that images, especially anthropomorphic images, have power and make impact in ways that reach beyond the particular cultures that produce them. In many religions, the painting in of eyes or mouths is understood

[21] Scholars now tend to emphasize that there is no sharp break between 'middle ages' and 'Reformation', even in Calvinist, iconoclastic England. See E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven, Conn, 1992); E. Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240–1570* (New Haven, 2006); J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985); D. Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists, or Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject",' in D. Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing* (New York, 1992), pp. 177–202; J. Simpson, 'The Rule of Medieval Imagination', in J. Dimmick, J. Simpson and N. Zeeman (eds), *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 4–24; S. Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008); and, with an emphasis on German material, Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, pp. 269–73 and p. 392 n. 10. T. Lentes, '"Andacht" und "Gebärde": Das religiöse Ausdrucksverhalten', in B. Jussen and C. Koslofsky (eds), *Kulturelle Reformation: Sinnformationen im Umbruch, 1400–1600* (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 26–67, brilliantly carries fourteenth- and fifteenth-century concerns forward into Reformation developments.

[22] For bibliography on this, see Bynum, 'The Sacrality of Things', Bynum, 'Avoiding the Tyranny', pp. 353–54 and 363–64, Dierkens *et al.*, *La performance*, and n. 5 above. Perhaps it is worth interjecting here that the issue of how objects carry meaning despite efforts to change interpretation arises in contexts other than that of the transition from medieval to early modern. Take, for example, the case of the pilgrimage, which lasted until the 1990s, to the so-called 'Deggendorfer Gnad'. The cult seems to have originated in the pogrom of 1337, although the first reference to a miraculous host comes from more than thirty years later and the elaborate legend of Jewish host desecration emerged only in the sixteenth century. Permitted and even fostered by the Nazis, who tried in general to suppress Catholic pilgrimage but encouraged Deggendorf because of its antisemitic connections, the cult had almost died by the 1970s when it was deliberately revived by Catholic authorities as a Eucharistic pilgrimage 'cleansed of all indications of host desecration'. Despite these efforts to break with historical continuity and reinterpret the cult, the bishop of Regensburg discontinued the pilgrimage in 1992, owing both to the impossibility of removing the antisemitic overtones and to the disputed historicity of the host itself (which had been 'renewed' several times). It is worth noting that there was great popular resistance to the suppression of the cult. See C.W. Bynum, 'The Presence of Objects: Medieval Anti-Judaism in Modern Germany', *Common Knowledge,* 10 (2004), pp. 1–32, here pp. 8–12.

to bring a figure to life.[23] Attacks on images often focus on gouging out the eyes as if to stop the figure from seeing the attacker or worshipper, or attack close to the eyes but seem, perhaps from fear, to avoid touching the eyes themselves.[24] Stories that statues or paintings come down directly from heaven or are made by the gods seem in many cultures to justify their veneration as if the divine inheres in them.[25] Although most cultural historians, following the theorizing of the anthropologist Alfred Gell, would not say that the statue or mask or totem is *stricto sensu* the god, much recent interpretation argues that objects have a kind of living, active presence that triggers a widespread response that is not culturally specific.[26] The words of J.P. Waghorne, describing Hindu images and temples, could equally well be used by many current students of western images. Waghorne says that images, 'freed from their status as inanimate things', thus gain 'power to transform and to recreate their creators'.[27] In similar words, Byzantine historian G. Peers argues that a separation of object and presence is an illusion:

> [A] reading of late antique animism would view all objects as potentially communicative subjects. This . . . is a relational position: that is, all human and material things relate in transformative and productive ways, and they do so . . . as equal participants.[28]

Such interpretation has been influenced and seemingly supported by recent theories from cognitive science that suggest that certain shapes, colours and so forth, have an impact on the human brain independent of the particular cultures that produce them.[29] There are a number of problems with such interpretations, not the least of

[23] D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989), pp. 51, 82–6, and 202; and J. Ellenbogen and A. Tugendhaft, 'Introduction', in J. Ellenbogen and A. Tugendhaft (eds), *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford, Calif., 2011), pp. 1–2. On the eye-opening ceremony in Hinduism, see R.H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 33–7; S.P. Huyler, 'The Experience: Approaching God', in J.S. Hawley and V. Narayanan (eds), *The Life of Hinduism* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006), pp. 33–41; and W. Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York, 2009), p. 352.

[24] See Freedberg, *Power of Images*, pp. 378–428; and Barber and Boldrick, *Art Under Attack*, fig. 11, p. 29; fig. 42, p. 59; and fig. 48, p. 65.

[25] On *acheiropoieta*, or images not made by human hands, see H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago, 1994), pp. 58, 62–9 and 73. For recent discussion of animating images, especially in Italy, see E. Thunø and G. Wolf (eds), *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Analecta Romana, Supplement, 35, Rome, 2004); J. Garnett and G. Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 2013); and M. Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven, 2013).

[26] A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998).

[27] J.P. Waghorne, 'The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World: The Sri Siva-Vishnu Temple in Suburban Washington, D.C.', in R. Orsi (ed.), *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1999), pp. 103–30, here p. 128.

[28] G. Peers, 'Object Relations: Theorizing the Late Antique Viewer', in S.F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 970–93, here p. 988. Peers's and Waghorne's way of looking at religious objects is currently very widespread and tends to be applied across cultures. For sensitive examples of a similar approach to medieval objects, see M. Camille, 'Mimetic Identification and Passion Devotion in the Later Middle Ages: A Double-Sided Panel by Meister Francke', in A.A. MacDonald *et al.* (eds), *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture* (Groningen, 1998), pp. 183–210, and Aden Kumler, 'Imitatio Rerum: Sacred Objects in the St Giles's Hospital Processional', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 44 (2014), pp. 469–502. Kumler audaciously and mostly convincingly treats liturgical objects as themselves having agency.

[29] See, for example, S. Guthrie, 'A Cognitive Theory of Religion', *Current Anthropology*, 21, 2 (1980), pp. 181–94; S. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford, 1993), especially pp. 103–2; E. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain: From Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York, 2012).

which is that, while claiming to treat materiality, they have tended to privilege what we in the west call 'art', and particularly art objects that are anthropomorphic.[30] Hence, evidence from cultures whose ritual objects are aniconic or whose ultimate 'Other' lacks anthropomorphic representation tends fairly easily to complicate or even falsify conclusions about devotional or visual responses as universal or even trans-cultural.

But despite these problems, treatment of images as triggering powerful responses by what they *are* is surely on some level correct and runs counter to any notion that religious objects could be what Luther called 'things of indifference'. Indeed, even recent interpretations of Protestant art have a very different focus. For example, such a visually astute interpretation as J. Koerner's massive volume on the Cranach altarpiece of 1547 from Wittenberg, although grounded in a sophisticated understanding of Lutheran theology, gives a power far beyond that of indifference to Lutheran art.[31]

II: Devotional Objects as Carriers of Continuity: Rothenburg and Wienhausen

With this as background, I come to several examples from German Protestant areas: one from a Lutheran church in the south and several from the northern women's houses on which I have been doing research. My southern example is the Riemenschneider Altar at Rothenburg ob der Tauber, which has been sensitively discussed recently by both J. Koerner and L.P. Wandel.[32]

In the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the church of St Jakob in Rothenburg was expanded and its blood relic, which had been moved into the church between 1285 and 1311, was rehoused in a shrine at the west end of the church.[33] In the centre of this shrine, a winged altarpiece by the famous sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider was installed between 1502 and 1505; at the stipulation of the donor the central panel depicted the Last Supper with Judas as the central figure. A Lutheran preacher was installed in Rothenburg in the early 1520s. The city then returned to Catholicism briefly twice, once after a revolt in 1525, and again after the Interim imposed by the emperor in 1548. It received its own Protestant Church Order in 1559. In 1582 the altarpiece was closed and the outside wings were partly painted over. At some point, the monstrance for the Eucharistic wafer, which was located in the centre of Riemenschneider's predella, was replaced by a crucifix.

Unlike most late medieval altarpieces, the Riemenschneider altar is monochrome—a fact which the art historian M. Baxandall saw as foreshadowing the plain style characteristic of Protestant churches.[34] J. Koerner has argued that focusing Last Supper depictions on the sop given to Judas might be seen as a particularly Protestant emphasis.[35] It seems to put

[30] I have discussed this in Bynum, 'Avoiding the Tyranny', pp. 353–4 and 363.

[31] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*.

[32] L.P. Wandel, 'Setting the Lutheran Eucharist', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2, 2 (1998), pp. 124–55; pp. 147–55 deal with Rothenburg. See also Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, pp. 343–46.

[33] The blood relic was perhaps the result of a Eucharistic miracle, perhaps a corporeal relic of Christ. Its exact provenance is unknown. See C.W. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 151 and 342 n. 79. See *ibid.* for a general discussion of blood relics.

[34] M. Baxandall, *Limewood Sculptures of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 186–90.

[35] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, p. 344. The motif of the sop to Judas is, however, fairly common in late medieval altars. For an example, see plate 2, between pp. 142 and 143, in C.W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Calif., 1987).

the individual conscience first, inducing the viewer to ask: 'am I sinning? Am I perpetuating the crucifixion?' Surrounded by and participating in Christ's presence, the viewer and communicant in St Jakob's stands between the Riemenschneider altar in the west and the eastern altar where the Last Supper is distributed. Because of these artistic emphases and foci, the altar has sometimes been seen as Protestant before the Reformation. But, as Koerner indicates, the Riemenschneider altar was in the sixteenth century known as the Holy Blood altar, and throughout the century, whatever modifications were made in the predella and wings, the cross holding a crystal reliquary with Christ's precious blood within shimmered above the monochrome carving or shuttered wings.[36] The reliquary is still there today, although its contents have disintegrated or disappeared (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Holy Blood Altar by Tilman Riemenschneider, 1502–5, St Jakob Church, Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

Photo: Marburg Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur.

[36] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, pp. 343–46, agrees that the presence of the crystal for the blood relic is crucial for understanding the continuation of piety.

How then do we date the 'coming of the Reformation' in Rothenburg ob der Tauber—a question to which previous historians have attached much importance? A simple chronology might date its beginnings to the arrival of the first Lutheran preacher in the 1520s, the first Lutheran Eucharist in 1544, or the promulgation of the Church Order in 1559. But through all the changes, the blood relic sparkled above the western altar. And we know that two hundred citizens of Rothenburg objected to the reformer Karlstadt's interpretation of the Eucharist as radically spiritual. In 1524, they signed a protest that claimed that 'all Christ-believing persons have received and enjoyed His tender Corpus Christi and His rose-coloured blood under the form of bread and wine . . . at least once a year'.[37] What chronology of religious change should we adopt? Should we see a reformation of sensibility beginning with a monochrome altarpiece that emphasizes individual conscience? Do we date the start of a new religion to a particular sermon or a piece of legislation? Or do we emphasize rather the insistent presence above all this of the sort of relic Luther himself steadfastly opposed and see in that relic a precondition for the citizens' conviction that Christ can be materially and corporally present in church ritual? We can never know what the people of Rothenburg thought they were seeing, but the visual persistence of the relic suggests a different course of development from a study of texts. Visually and physically present, the blood of Christ endured, although we do not know how long.

I turn now to several examples from Kloster Wienhausen, one of six Protestant female communities in the Lüneburg Heath in Lower Saxony under the supervision of the Klosterkammer Hannover, a state authority.[38] A backwater in the twenty-first century, Wienhausen was anything but in the medieval period.[39] Altencelle, close by, was the ducal seat in the thirteenth century, and Wienhausen was the ducal house cloister. Founded as a monastery for nuns in the 1220s, affiliated with but not incorporated into the Cistercians, Wienhausen was reformed in 1469 by Johannes Busch according to

[37] 'Protest against the suspension of the Mass of the Holy Blood in Rothenburg', quoted in Wandel, 'Setting the Lutheran Eucharist', p. 150.

[38] In what follows I concentrate on Wienhausen but use material from the other five Lüneburg cloisters to supplement what we know about Wienhausen.

[39] On Wienhausen in its context, the best work is now J.L. Meacham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, edited by A.I. Beach, C.H. Berman and L.M. Bitel (Turnhout, 2014) with full bibliography. See also J. Meacham, 'Cooperative Piety among Monastic and Secular Women in Late Medieval Germany', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 88 (2008), pp. 581–61. On the Lüneburg cloisters, see also J. Dolle (ed. with D. Knochenhauer), *Niedersächsisches Klosterbuch: Verzeichnis der Klöster, Stifte, Kommenden und Beginenhäuser in Niedersachsen und Bremen von den Anfängen bis 1810* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Historische Landesforschung der Universität Göttingen, 56, Bielefeld, 2012), and I.-C. Riggert, *Die Lüneburger Frauenklöster* (Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission für Niedersachsen und Bremen, 37, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Niedersachsens im Mittelalter, 19, Hanover, 1996). D. Zimmerling, *Von Zeit und Ewigkeit: Die Lüneburger Klöster* (Braunschweig, 1995) gives a good account of the Protestant Reformation. On the twentieth century, see W. Brandis, 'Kloster Wienhausen seit der Reformation', in K. Maier, *Kloster Wienhausen: Geschichte, Architektur und bildende Kunst: Ein Überblick* (7th edn, Wienhausen, 1997), pp. 10–12. I have treated some aspects of Wienhausen in C.W. Bynum, '"Crowned with Many Crowns": Nuns and Their Statues in Late-Medieval Wienhausen', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 101 (2015), pp. 18–40. The historicist commitment of the sisters seems to have developed since the nineteenth century, but, as Meacham points out in *Sacred Communities*, pp. 193–96, the Observant reformers encouraged the sisters to do research into their histories and write chronicles of their houses. On these chronicles, see A. Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn., 2004).

the Observant reform emanating from Windesheim, a first reformation that ushered in a cultural flowering. Although Wienhausen's buildings and properties were partly destroyed in the mid-sixteenth century by the efforts of Duke Ernest the Confessor to impose the Lutheran reformation, Wienhausen survived, like other nunneries in the area, changing only slowly over the course of the next two centuries. Today the women's houses of the Lüneburg Heath, securely Protestant in commitment, work to preserve the cultural heritage of the area, a sense of vocation that was greatly fostered in the twentieth century by the success of the 1928 exhibition of tapestries and embroideries from Wienhausen and Kloster Lüne. Wienhausen has an extraordinarily rich collection of weavings, secular as well as religious in subject; a large number of statues; a remarkable collection of small devotional objects, sewing materials and the oldest extant examples of wooden-framed rivet eyeglasses, discovered under the choirstalls in 1953; and vibrant paintings of the nuns' choir itself. Together, these make Wienhausen the place where historians, the devout and the curious public can best still see the art of the middle ages, undamaged and in situ.[40]

Figure 2: Holy Body, today known as the Grave-Christ (ca. 1290), in a sepulchre (ca. 1448). Kloster Wienhausen.

Photo: Klosterarchive Wienhausen.

[40] On the tapestries, especially the famous Tristan tapestry, see H. Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen von Hans Grubenbecher, Dietrich Klatt und Jens Rheinländer* (Wienhausen, 1986), pp. 35–45. On the tapestries and embroideries from Kloster Lüne, see Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 66–74 and 180–93. On the statues at Wienhausen, see Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen*, pp. 22–30, and H. Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene und das Heilige Blut zu Wienhausen: Über Kult und Kunst im späten Mittelalter', *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte,* 1 (1961), pp. 73–138. On the 'Find' of 1953, see H. Appuhn and C. von Heusinger, 'Der Fund kleiner Andachtsbilder des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in Kloster Wienhausen', *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte,* 4 (1965),

I begin with the large and lavishly decorated holy sepulchre located today in the nun's choir, the largest free-standing wooden structure of its type extant. It houses a figure of Christ, partly clothed, with his wounds exposed and emphasized (see Fig. 2). The Christ figure was made about 1290, at the same time as several other devotional objects very important to the convent: the enthroned Madonna, the resurrected Christ between two angels (see Fig. 5), and a large figure of the founder, Agnes. Known today as the 'grave Christ' but called by the nuns in the middle ages the 'holy body', the Christ figure is flat and hollow; it is therefore not as heavy as it appears and was probably carried in performance in the middle ages, although it is today bolted into its sarcophagus. That sarcophagus was commissioned about 1448 by the aristocratic abbess Katharina von Hoya, whose family coat of arms is still visible on the side. It probably replaces an older grave house or niche of some kind, and indeed the lid (or at least the hinges) of the sarcophagus may come from an earlier structure. Although some of the outside was changed in 1885, much of the inside painting, depicting the crucifixion and entombing, is original. In 1448 the bishop gave an indulgence of forty days to anyone who visited the holy grave or offered lights or ornaments to the chapel where it was located.[41]

We know that this chapel was shared with the laity; one side connected to the nuns' chapter house, the other to the parish church through a small opening. Although the introduction of the Observant reform to Wienhausen in 1469 tried to de-emphasize contact with the laity and enforce stricter enclosure, this was clearly not very successful. In 1483, a visitation criticized the nuns for opening the doors of their church to show off their devotional objects and church ornaments. Probably in 1448, at the time the figure was granted indulgences, relic bundles were put into the head and feet, although this may also have happened earlier.

Some graffiti on the right arm suggest that the figure was mostly approached from its right, and there are traces of the anointing of oil over many years on the right side of the shroud, arm and foot. Although the chapel was moved between 1501 and 1505 and the location of the figure in the sixteenth century is not entirely clear, we have evidence that this kind of tactile devotion and anointing with oil lasted in other places in the region into the seventeenth century. Several of the little prayer cards made by the nuns themselves depict devotion to the holy sepulchre, and in a stained glass window that echoes the motif, we see a little nun herself praying in front of the grave (see Fig. 3).[42] Although we cannot completely reconstruct the Easter performance that was undoubtedly associated with this holy grave, part of a Visitatio ritual survives from Wienhausen from about 1400. The scholars H. Appuhn, K. Hengevoss-Dürkop and J. Meacham, who have worked extensively on Wienhausen and its objects, argue that the grave Christ,

pp. 157–238, and H. Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund vom Nonnenchor* (Wienhausen, 1973). On the vault paintings, see W. Michler, *Kloster Wienhausen: Die Wandmalereien im Nonnenchor* (Wienhausen, 1968), p. 59. The painting was probably initially done soon after the choir was built in 1308; the Chronicle tells us that it was renewed in 1488 by three nuns named Gertrude; it was again restored in 1867–68. Since the rather sharp black outlines of the figures long continued to show through, it is likely that the restorers followed the originals closely. Moreover, the paintings as we see them today follow the style of the late Romanesque of the region.

[41] On the grave Christ, see Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen*, pp. 28–9 and p. 68 n. 20; Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene', pp. 126–36; and Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 11, 37, 41–2.

[42] U.-D. Korn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 5: *Die Glasmalereien* (Wienhausen, 1975), p. 35. The glass is original but the place of its installation in the cloister may have been altered in the nineteenth century.

Figure 3: Window showing a nun in Cistercian habit praying before Christ in the sepulchre. Glass from ca. 1330–40. Kloster Wienhausen.

Photo: Klosterarchive Wienhausen.

in conjunction with the figure of the resurrected Christ between two angels made at the same time as the grave Christ, was used to enact the death and burial of Christ on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter day—a ritual performance particularly important to religious women because of the role of women as witnesses to the resurrection.[43]

In the 1520s, Duke Ernest the Confessor attempted to introduce Lutheran practices. In 1531, he had about a quarter of Wienhausen torn down because of the nuns' resistance. Relic veneration was forbidden, and then or later some of the devotional figures probably had their sockels prised open and relics removed.[44] But change came very slowly. The nuns resisted communion in two kinds and avoided the required suppression of the *Salve regina* until the late 1530s. Catholic abbesses were elected until 1587. The Cistercian habit was put off only in 1616; the Latin Hours ended only in 1620; as late as 1722, we find the Prince Elector of Hanover still trying to put a stop to the adorning of statues with clothes and jewellery. A relic bundle found under the floor of the nuns' choir during excavations at Wienhausen in 1953 may have been hidden at the time of the Duke's attack in an effort to save it from desecration and place it in holy space. But when the grave Christ was opened in 1863 for restoration, its relics—some from 1290, some from 1370, and some from 1440–50—were still in place.

[43] Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene;' K. Hengevoss-Dürkop, 'Der Wienhauser Auferstehungs-Christus. Überlegungen zum Frauenkloster als Formgelegenheit', in Städtische Galerie Liebieghaus (eds), *Studien zur Geschichte der europäischen Skulptur im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt/Main, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 483–93, vol. 2, pp. 288–95; and Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 30–51. And see nn. 77–80 below.

[44] The relics of the main altar in the nuns' choir were removed in 1543. See Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene', p. 78.

Down to today, the sisters have private and richly decorated individual cells, despite repeated efforts of reformers (both Observant and Protestant) to enforce greater communality of life.[45] Archival material suggests that the nuns continued well into the sixteenth century to make for themselves little images of figures such as the resurrected Christ and the holy grave and hang these in their cells for private use. A number of the surviving small devotional objects from Wienhausen have thongs attached for hanging. They were clearly not only carried about and used for private prayer during communal services but also hung in individual cells for personal use.[46] And despite the fact that the collecting of indulgences fell away in the sixteenth century, the grave Christ continued to be visited. Its religious significance endured even as its artistic significance (as the oldest large figure of its type in Germany) became apparent.

In 1862, when all the cloisters of the region were requested to send art work to the new Welfenmuseum founded in Hanover in 1861 by King George V, Wienhausen was asked to surrender the grave Christ. But the abbess refused. Her argument suggests how long religious observance can survive. She argued that the object could not be moved because the peasants of the parish, according to an old tradition, had the right to come into the cloister, go to the chapter room and say a silent *Pater noster* before the holy grave located there—a holy grave that still had its relics (however unknown their presence), much of its fifteenth-century decoration and traces of anointing by generation upon generation of sisters and laity.[47]

When, then, did 'the Reformation' come to Wienhausen?

III: Devotional Objects as Evidence of the Nature of Piety: The Clothing of Statues

This article may seem so far to be making the rather unsurprising argument that religious change often comes slowly. That general point does not need much emphasizing to scholars today, although it is hardly self-evident to a wider public in the light of the preparations underfoot in Germany to celebrate in 2017 the 500th anniversary of Luther and the coming of the Reformation. As noted above, the wider German and European publics seem to want precise dates for world historical events, no matter how resistant experts are to providing them.[48] Nonetheless, I am not merely arguing that the periodization of religious change is complicated by attention to objects, which often carry practice into a future untransformed by assertions of new doctrinal interpretations. I am suggesting in addition that objects themselves often tell a different and much more labile and confused story than that told by texts. We can date quite precisely Duke Ernest's prohibitions of Latin and relics, indulgences and devotion to Mary, as

[45] On efforts by the reformers Johannes Meyer and Johannes Busch to curb private devotion, which also make clear that it continued, see J.F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998), pp. 440–41, and Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 165–70. On the continuation of private devotion, see also Riggert, *Die Lüneburger Frauenklöster*, pp. 193–94, and C. Klack-Eitzen, W. Haase and T. Weissgraf, *Heilige Röcke: Kleider für Skulpturen in Kloster Wienhausen* (Regensburg, 2013), pp. 62–3.

[46] See the objects reproduced in Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund*, pp. 35, 40 and 41. And see n. 59 below.

[47] Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen,* pp. 22–3.

[48] See above n. 21 and below n. 86.

we can date the Church Order of Rothenburg; we can say when the first pastor with a Lutheran affiliation arrived in various cities in Germany. But it is harder to date the endurance or attenuation of the power of the blood relic in the Riemenschneider altar or the sacrality given by the grave Christ to space for saying the *Pater noster*. Objects may tell their own story of use and continuity, or rupture and rejection.[49] Particularly in Germany, where the definition of religious affiliation was usually dictated by prince or patriciate, not the populace, we may need to look to objects for evidence about what people were really doing religiously.

I turn then to another set of objects from Wienhausen - statues and their clothes - a large collection of which survives and has been technically analysed in a catalogue, *Heilige Röcke*, published in 2013.[50] My point is not only to argue that they provide evidence of continuity of practice long beyond what religious legislation might suggest; it is also to demonstrate that such evidence, if carefully considered, carries its own story about devotional life—one which contradicts in certain ways recent generalizations about medieval and early modern piety.

This is especially important for women's religious life in northern Germany because, as a number of historians have pointed out, the comparison with southern Germany and the Rhineland is stark. In contrast to the mystical texts and nuns' books with their collections of extravagant visions produced in these areas by women themselves in the fourteenth century, and the large amount of literature of advice directed toward women by men such as Tauler engaged in the *cura monialium* (pastoral care of nuns), there are no texts of these types from the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century north.[51] We do have prayer books and nuns' diaries—a cache of manuscript material that scholars such as Eva Schlotheuber and Henrike Lähnemann are just beginning to explore.[52] But if we are going to speak about worship and daily life we must also use the objects themselves.

[49] See above n. 11.

[50] Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*.

[51] See W. Williams-Krapp, '"Dise ding sint dennoch nit ware zeichen der heiligkeit": Zur Bewertung mystischer Erfahrungen im 15. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 80 (1990), pp. 61–71, here pp. 66–7, and C.T. Jones, 'Rekindling the Light of Faith: Hymn Translation and Spiritual Renewal in the Fifteenth-Century Observant Reform', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 42 (2012), pp. 567–96, here pp. 570 and 592 n. 12. For an elegant example of the use of mystical literature to understand performance with dolls, see U. Rublack, 'Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents', *Gender and History,* 6 (1994), pp. 37–57.

[52] E. Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung: Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter: Mit einer Edition des 'Konventstagebuchs' einer Zisterzienserin von Heilig-Kreuz bei Braunschweig (1484–1507)* (Tübingen, 2004); E. Schlotheuber, 'Ebstorf und seine Schülerinnen in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahnrhundert', in Eisermann *et al.*, *Studien und Texte*, pp. 169–221; E. Schlotheuber, 'Klostereintritt und Übergangsriten: Die Bedeutung der Jungfräulichkeit für das Selbstverständnis der Nonnen der Alten Orden', in J.F. Hamburger *et al.*, in cooperation with the Ruhrlandmuseum Essen (eds), *Frauen-Kloster-Kunst: Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters: Beiträge zum Internationalen Kolloquium vom 13. bis 16. Mai 2005 anlässlich der Ausstellung* '*Krone und Schleier*' (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 43–55; H. Lähnemann, 'Schnipsel, Schleier, Textkombinatorik: Die Materialität der Medinger Orationalien', in M. Schubert (ed.), *Materialität in der Editionswissenschaft* (Supplement to editio, vol. 32, Berlin, 2010), pp. 189–202; H. Lähnemann, 'Bilingual Devotion: The Prayer Books from the Lüneburg Convents', in E. Andersen, H. Lähnemann and A. Simon (eds), *Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 44, Leiden 2013), pp. 317–41; H. Lähnemann, 'Der Medinger "Nonnenkrieg" aus der Perspektive der Klosterreform: Geistliche Selbstbehauptung 1479–1554', in K. Scheepers *et al.* (eds), *1517–45: The Northern Experience. Mysticism, Art and Devotion between late Medieval and Early Modern* (ed.) (Berlin, forthcoming).

Using objects to chart the persistence or change of piety is more difficult than it might at first glance seem. Reception is notoriously hard to determine or document even where texts exist. As noted above, there is no reason to think that sermons on the Last Supper or penitence or baptism preached by a Lutheran minister actually shaped the viewer's experience of a font or chalice, a predella or a statue of the Virgin. Indeed, we have evidence from sixteenth-century women's houses in the Wienhausen area that the sisters actively objected to new interpretations. They prayed with their rosaries when forced to listen to Protestant sermons. Later, when denied the hours in Latin, they retreated to the refectory after services in the chapel and sang the Latin office there.[53]

Moreover, even the most sensitive effort to interpret the objects themselves runs the risk of projecting back later reactions and assumptions. If we take, for example, the figures of Christ, Mary and the saints that were dressed and undressed, paraded and manipulated, in the late medieval liturgy, it is clear that action, performance, doing and not just seeing was involved. But what did this mean to the performers? Mid-twentieth-century interpretations tended to see such practices as particularly popular with nuns and devout laywomen because they reflected the craving of deprived or frustrated women for erotic experience or motherhood. More recently, a number of historians, among them R. Trexler, U. Rublack, J. Hamburger, T. Lentes, J. Jung and A. Powell have explored with greater sympathy the practice of adorning statues as essentially performative and processual.[54] The worshipper gives clothes and jewels to the saint in recognition of, or as a request for, gifts from the saint to the worshipper. But even in more recent scholarship, interpretations of such giving vary widely. Powell, building on some of Koerner's ideas about Reformation images, has argued that dressing statues, and constructing them with movable arms or legs to facilitate dressing, causes distance and becomes a prelude to the demotion of the image into an object that presages Reformation iconoclasm. A doll that can be manipulated declares itself not alive. In contrast, Hamburger and Rublack have stressed that clothing a statue gives it value and presence; changing its clothes makes the body underneath hidden and mysterious, hence even more alive. Some French scholars have gone so far as to assert that the ornamentation (*parure*) makes the object, whether statue or relic, sacred.[55] But however exactly we interpret their tactility and performativity, we need to note that the statues' clothes and ornamentation survived the coming of the Reformation by hundreds of years in northern Germany and carry, in their physical materiality, evidence about specific use.

[53] Riggert, *Die Lüneburger Frauenklöster*, pp. 348–49.

[54] R. Trexler, 'Der Heiligen neue Kleider: Eine analytische Skizze zur Be- und Entkleidung von Statuen', in K. Schreiner and N. Schnitzler (eds), *Gepeinigt, begehrt, vergessen: Symbolik und Sozialbezug des Körpers im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1992), pp. 362–402; C. Klapisch-Zuber, 'Holy Dolls: Play and Devotion in Florence in the Quattrocento', in C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. L. Cochrane (Chicago, 1985), pp. 310–31; Rublack, 'Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus'; Hamburger, 'Introduction', in Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, pp 7–8; A.K. Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York, 2012), pp. 81–95, 167–209; and Jung, 'The Tactile and the Visionary'. On what he calls 'fictive clothing', see T. Lentes, 'Die Gewänder der Heiligen—Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zum Verhältnis von Gebet, Bild und Imagination', in G. Kerscher (ed.), *Hagiographie und Kunst: Der Heiligenkult in Schrift, Bild und Architektur* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 120–51.

[55] J.-C. Schmitt, 'Les images et le sacré', and T. Golsenne, 'Parure et culte', in Dierkens *et al.* (eds), *La performance*, pp. 29–46 and 71–86.

There are several generalizations about the course of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious history in the women's houses of the German north that the evidence of clothing and devotional objects tends, if not to contradict, at least significantly to complicate. In the late 1460s and 1470s many religious houses in this part of Germany were subjected to what we call Observant Reform from the congregations of Bursfeld and Windesheim. We are told that, for the women's houses, this reformation involved a new emphasis on strict enclosure; the confiscation of private property and discouragement of private devotion; a stress on texts rather than objects; a renewed commitment to education and a return from vernacular worship to Latin; and a new interior piety with stress on the sufferings of Christ. In 1531, Ernest the Confessor, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, attempted to introduce a second reformation with, among other things, Lutheran preaching, communion in two kinds, a vernacular liturgy and suppression of relics, the cult of saints and Marian veneration. In response to the nuns' resistance, he destroyed about a fourth of the convent's buildings and confiscated the property of the provost, which was a substantial part of the house's support. A chronicle written by the nuns, which survives in a seventeenth-century version but is clearly based on a much older account (it consistently refers to the Protestants as 'heretics'), tells of resistance to both reformations but eventual capitulation.[56] Indeed, in the case of the Observant reformation of 1469, recent secondary accounts tell us that there was rapid capitulation and a flowering of convent life for about fifty years afterwards, manifested in the production of many new manuscripts. We are also told of struggle and decay for many years after the attack and confiscations of the 1530s.

None of this is wrong. But the more than twenty garments of statues that survive from Wienhausen, considered in the context of other examples of statues and their ornaments that survive from the region, suggest a somewhat more nuanced story.

The Observant reformation following 1469 did result in a flowering of Latin texts. Indeed, the little garments made subsequently help us to document this because some of the discarded vernacular texts were used as stiffening in the skirts of the dresses—stiffening that can still be retrieved and read.[57] But there was also a tremendous flowering of the visual. The paintings in the choir were renewed in 1488.[58] The majority of the devotional objects discovered in the Find of 1953 under the floor of the nuns' choirstalls come from circa 1500, and however much the Observant reformers criticized private devotion, many of these were clearly little objects to be used in private meditation.[59] The presence of a large amount of sewing equipment—needles, threads, little pearls and sequins for decoration and so forth—in the Find of 1953 suggests that the nuns did embroidery in the choir, making ornaments for the saints rather than concentrating on the Latin or later the Protestant office. The Observant reformers Johannes Busch and Johannes Meyer themselves repeatedly

[56] *Chronik und Totenbuch des Klosters Wienhausen* (ed.), and introduced H. Appuhn (3rd edn, Wienhausen, 1986). Page numbers refer to those of the original manuscript. Roman numerals refer to the *Totenbuch*. For the Chronicle, the editor has reordered the material to make it chronological.

[57] See H. Lähnemann, 'Text und Textil', in Klack-Eitzen *et al.*, *Heilige Röcke*, pp. 71–8.

[58] On the paintings, see n. 40 above.

[59] Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund*, pp. 40 and 41, and Appuhn and Heusinger, 'Der Fund', pp. 164–7. These little medallions of papier mâché were made by the nuns themselves in a mould or press and painted individually. The two shown by Appuhn were made from the same mould and differently coloured. One has a thong for hanging, which indicates that it was used in a private cell.

criticized the nuns for taking objects from church or chapels into their private cells.[60] And the Wienhausen Chronicle, which is mostly a rather straightforward account of political events, waxes eloquent when it describes the confiscations just after 1469.

The Chronicle describes the abbess of Derneburg, sent to impose reform, as confiscating holy objects, both the nuns' own veils and the jewels of the statues of the saints, 'as a thief would'. As a result,

> the images of the saints and their adornments were held in low esteem, . . . many good customs were abolished and declared to be foolishness, and from these [acts], many a soul that was at peace before was cast into anguish and sadness.[61]

So upsetting was this event to the nuns that they were afflicted just afterwards—the only time such things are recounted in the Chronicle—with sightings of ghosts and demons.[62] Although the sense of spiritual suffering voiced here may seem muted when compared with the effusions of earlier woman-authored texts from other areas, we need to note that the Wienhausen Chronicle is almost entirely a matter-of-fact account of convent holdings. Abbesses described in the necrology (*Totenbuch*) as 'good mothers' are those who maintain or increase the convent's wealth.[63] A short account of 'miracles' tacked on at the end of the Chronicle gives only five quite conventional stories.[64] Hence, the reference here to anguished suffering at the loss of the saints' dresses, jewels and crowns, like the fear of demonic reprisals, is evidence of how much the adorning of statues meant. Confiscating the saints' jewels meant confiscating their honour and deriding their power.

The material itself of the statues' dresses (brocade, silk or linen that can be documented to come from a period between the fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries) indicates that most were made between 1469 and 1587. And the Wienhausen necrology, begun in 1474, records many donations of clothing (usually by women), some of it explicitly 'for the saints'. Although it is of the nature of a necrology that the year is not given, we can occasionally date the donors in other ways and ascertain that at least one donation comes from the sixteenth century.[65] Surviving inventories make it clear that the statues' garments were used until the early eighteenth century. An inventory of 1722 makes it clear that the clothing has been reduced to two outfits per statue, and in 1732 there is mention of the need to cut off the pearls and gold disks from the garments for sale.[66] Clearly some of the extant garments have been stripped of their most valuable ornaments but it is not known whether sales were carried out in the eighteenth century or not. In any case, the fact that the wardrobes of the statues have been reduced to two garments by the early 1720s suggests that they were still dressed, else why would two outfits be retained and the inventories list them? We know that the statue of the resurrected Christ at Wienhausen was adorned with his crown until 1685, and at Wienhausen's neighbouring house Lüne the Elector of Hanover was still trying

[60] See n. 45 above.

[61] *Chronik*, pp. 22–3. I have discussed this incident at greater length in Bynum, 'Crowned with Many Crowns'.

[62] See Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, p. 164.

[63] For an excellent discussion of the nuns' relationship with 'property', both before and after the Observant reform, see Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, pp. 89–126.

[64] *Chronik*, pp. 140–45.

[65] *Totenbuch*, p. XLII (for Feb.25). There are also gifts of jewellery to the crucifix and gifts of money to provide clothing for the Virgin. And see Klack-Eitzen *et al.*, *Heilige Röcke*, p. 28.

[66] Klack-Eitzen *et al.*, *Heilige Röcke*, p. 29.

to prohibit the dressing of a Mary statue in 1722.[67] It is clear then that the women of Wienhausen were adorning their statues right through both reformations.

Moreover, the clothes are sometimes labelled to indicate which figure they are intended for. Labels also state whether the garments are for daily use or feast days.[68] Thus, the statues had their private property—their own dresses—but any member of the community, instructed by the labels, could ready them for daily worship. The dressing and be-jewelling of the saints was a communal act. It seems very unlikely that it was, in Powell's terms, a demotion of the statues to lifelessness or that the insistence on clothing Mary was merely an indifference filled with Lutheran theological interpretation.

But do these clothes tell us anything more than that older practices survived down into the eighteenth century? Arguably, they do, and this is my final point. To put it a little baldly, the story we are usually told is that, by the fifteenth century, medieval devotion (especially female devotion) was mired in suffering and blood, in a piety that concentrated on inducing a guilt against which works must be accumulated, not on accepting the liberation of offered salvation. The Protestant Reformation was then, among other things, a reaction against this—against guilt, works and acts. The little dresses at Wienhausen and the bodies they dressed, like the shimmering, salvific blood at Rothenburg, suggest a different and more nuanced account. At Wienhausen and the other women's houses in northern Germany, we find throughout the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries a very active piety of works, a sense of the glory of the resurrection and a confident hope of heaven, all of which are celebrated in the dresses and jewels of the saints.

There is, of course, devotion to the suffering Christ at Wienhausen. A now partially destroyed image of the crucified Christ was much revered and supposedly worked miracles.[69] Of the manuscript fragments discovered in the Find under the nuns' choir, three substantial ones are meditations on the crown of Christ as a crown of thorns.[70] But the nuns also saw their own clothes as signs of espousal and foretastes of glory, paralleling the clothes of the Virgin in heaven.[71] They wore the Cistercian habit and the nun's crown that was part of it (at least in north Germany) until the seventeenth century, long after they had to accept a Lutheran *domina* (convent head).[72]

[67] Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene', p. 98; and Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, p. 30.

[68] Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, pp. 42–3, figs. 34, 36, 37. On the dressing of statues as a communal act, see *ibid.*, pp. 66.

[69] See Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen*, pp. 24–9 and figure 30; and *Chronik*, p. 141.

[70] J. Meacham, 'Reading between the Lines: Compilation, Variation, and the Recovery of an Authentic Female Voice in the *Dornenkron* Prayer Books from Wienhausen', *Journal of Medieval History*, 29, 2 (2003), pp. 109–28.

[71] E. Wetter, 'Von Bräuten und Vikaren Christi: Zur Konstruktion von Ähnlichkeit im sakralen Initiationsakt', in M. Gaier, J. Kohl, and A. Saviello (eds), *Similitudo: Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Munich, 2012), pp. 129–46.

[72] On nuns' crowns, see D. Koslin, 'The Robe of Simplicity: Initiation, Robing, and Veiling of Nuns in the Middle Ages', in S. Gordon (ed.), *Robes and Honour: The Medieval World of Investiture* (Basingstoke, 2001) pp. 255–74, which is mostly on England; Schlotheuber, *Klostereintritt und Bildung*, pp. 156–74; E. Schlotheuber, 'Best Clothes and Everyday Attire of Late Medieval Nuns', in R.C. Schwinges and R. Schorta with K. Oschema (eds), *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe/Mode und Kleidung im Europa des späten Mittelalters* (Basel and Riggisberg, 2010), pp. 139–54; J. Hotchin, 'The Nun's Crown', *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 4 (2009), pp. 187–94; Wetter, 'Von Bräuten'; and Bynum, 'Crowned with Many Crowns'. According to Schlotheuber (*Klostereintritt*, pp. 159–60), the nun's crown was common in north Germany and rare in the south. On the importance of headgear to indicate status, see G. Signori, 'Veil, Hat or Hair? Reflections on an Asymmetrical Relationship', *The Medieval History Journal*, 8, 1 (2005), pp. 25–47. For a reproduction of the one extant medieval nun's crown, see Schlotheuber, 'Best Clothes', p. 146 fig. 7.

I have explored elsewhere the significance of parallels between the nuns' own crowns and those of their statues.[73] Suffice it to say here that offering clothes and jewels to the statues mattered because dress mattered. Giving garments, gems and crowns induced the saints to favour those who made the gifts and rejoiced the hearts of the heavenly recipients. Moreover, the nuns' crowns echoed those of Mary and the saints.

Here below, after her profession and crowning, the nun was in some way assimilated to the queen of heaven, Christ's bride as well as mother, although the gap between earthly striving and heavenly glory was carefully preserved visually. If we compare the crowns of the Mary statues at Wienhausen with the depictions we have of the crowns worn by the sisters, the difference is clear. On the vault at Wienhausen, the founding abbess is depicted with the cap-like crown worn by the nuns, made of two simple bands of white cloth that cross over the head and are held in place by a white circlet embroidered with red crosses. In contrast, the martyrs depicted on the same vaults, like the processional statue of the Virgin made for Wienhausen after the confiscations of 1469, wear golden crowns that glisten and thrust upwards.[74] All these crowns are called *coronae* in the Latin documents but they are not all the same.[75] The crowns of those who have achieved heavenly glory point up and shimmer in gold; the crowns of the nuns are more like caps and are decorated with the red crosses of Christ's wounds. But nonetheless the nuns wore crowns—we know that they even wore them to bed—and they received these crowns at the time of their change of identity into the dedicated brides of Christ (that is, investiture and profession). The garments of the nuns both did and did not echo the garments of their statues, but in both cases clothes were not merely accoutrements; they signalled identity. And the identity they signalled was at least as much one hopeful of glory as penitential in its earthly waiting.[76]

The importance of the glorious clothing with which the nuns dressed their statues is clear if we consider the devotional figure of the resurrected Christ, made about 1290, at the same time as the grave Christ. The statue (see Fig. 5) was probably involved in the Easter liturgy from the early fifteenth century and perhaps earlier and wore its silver crown until the later seventeenth century.[77] Our knowledge that it was dressed gives a new interpretation to much of the debate about it conducted by art historians over the past sixty years. Although the statue has clothes carved on it, it has a prominent side wound through which a tiny hole is bored. Historians have debated whether it was a sacrament house or tabernacle to contain a monstrance for the host, perhaps paired on the high altar with Wienhausen's blood relic. The debate has involved technical questions about locks on sacrament houses that cannot be explored here.[78] But what we

[73] Bynum, 'Crowned with Many Crowns'.

[74] See Bynum, 'Crowned with Many Crowns', plates 1, 2 and 3.

[75] German distinguishes *Krone* (crown) and *Kranz* (wreath). See N. Gussone, 'Krönung', and A. Laag, 'Kranz', in *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 2 (Freiburg, 1970), pp. 661–71 and 558–60; and E. Vavra 'Kleidung', and V.H. Elbern, 'Krone', *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 5 (Munich, 2002), pp. 1198–1200 and 1544–7.

[76] On the complexity of this, see Bynum, 'Crowned with Many Crowns'.

[77] See Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene'; Hengevoss-Dürkop, 'Der Wienhauser Auferstehungs-Christus'; K. Hengevoss-Dürkop, *Skulptur und Frauenkloster: Studien zu Bildwerken der Zeit um 1300 aus Frauenklöstern des ehemaligen Fürstentums Lüneburg* (Artefact, 7, Berlin, 1994), pp. 35–7 and 139–61; Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, p. 35; and Klack-Eitzen *et al.*, *Heilige Röcke*, pp. 49–52.

[78] See B. Hartwieg, 'Drei gefässte Holzskulpturen vom Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts in Kloster Wienhausen', *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, 2 (1988), pp. 187–262, here pp. 188–95; Hengevoss-Dürkop, *Skulptur und Frauenkloster*; and Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, pp. 97 and 499 n. 293.

learn from recent study of the 'holy dresses' is that the statue was clothed with a green robe that made the wound invisible (see Fig. 4).[79] Wear from light on one side of the dress indicates that the statue stood on the altar clothed. This at least suggests caution about understanding it as a monstrance and certainly downplays the significance of wound devotion in its veneration.

Moreover, we have several little prayer cards from Wienhausen that depict the statue, and images of the resurrection that are in fact depictions of this statue abound at Wienhausen—on lanterns, on little wall plaques, in the stained glass and on the ceiling.[80] Sometimes, as on one extant prayer card and in a fourteenth-century stained glass window, the wound is not represented at all. Even where the wounds are prominent, the depictions all emphasize the glory of the resurrection. On one little prayer card, whose banderoles give extensive instructions for meditation, the wound is more like a small, golden, diamond-shaped jewel than a gaping hole (see Fig. 6).[81]

Figure 4: Green dress for Wienhausen's statue of the resurrected Christ. The central panel was formerly red, and is now rust-brown. Made in late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

Photo: Barbara Eismann, Hamburg.

[79] Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, p. 84, Kat. Nr. 1. Because the curators have painstakingly constructed models of the garments and tried them on the statues, we are certain this *was* for the resurrected Christ. For light damage, see Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, p. 62 fig. 58.

[80] Meacham, *Sacred Communities*, p. 35; Hengevoss-Dürkop, 'Der Wienhauser Auferstehungs-Christus', *Studien zur Geschichte der europäischen Skulptur,* vol. 2, pp. 288–95. For an example in a fourteenth-century stained glass, Korn, *Die Glasmalereien*, p. 28; for one on a lantern, Maier, *Kloster Wienhausen*, p. 34 fig. 29; for an example from a Processional that shows no wound, see Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen: Aufnahmen*, p. 72; for the same motif on an embroidery from Kloster Lüne, see Appuhn, 'Der Auferstandene', p. 115.

[81] See Klack-Eitzen *et al., Heilige Röcke*, p. 42, fig. 35, and Appuhn, *Kloster Wienhausen*, 4: *Der Fund*, p. 27.

Figure 5: Resurrected Christ (ca. 1290), originally between two angels. The carved cloak is red over a yellow tunic. The side wound is bored with a tiny hole.

Photo: Klosterarchive Wienhausen.

In the longue durée of Wienhausen devotion, especially if we consider the material and visual evidence, the emphasis is at least as much on the glory as on the suffering of Christ. This example—and there are also others—suggests not only a continuity of spirituality at Wienhausen through both reformations but also that, at least in this case, the conventional description of that spirituality is not quite correct for either the fifteenth or the sixteenth century. The resurrected Christ at Wienhausen is not only a 'thing of indifference'. He also seems to induce and perpetuate a piety that is not the fixation on suffering often attributed to the late middle ages but rather a sense of glory, triumph and active piety to which historians need to pay more attention.

Figure 6: A small devotional picture of the resurrected Christ dressed in a green cloak over an orange tunic and wearing a crown. The figure is surrounded by banderoles containing prayers and hymns. Created about 1320. The sarcophagus was retouched in the early sixteenth century. This picture was discovered under the floorboards of the nuns' choir at Wienhausen in 1953.

Photo: Klosterarchive Wienhausen.

IV: Conclusion

In conclusion then, I return to the paradox with which I began. The question why 'Catholic' objects survive down to today in Protestant lands—and indeed why they have recently, in some areas, been emphasized as loci of pilgrimage or religious retreats—is a complicated one.[82] Answering it necessitates investigating details of local history that differ from region to region. As I have suggested, the very instability of Protestant areas meant there was little time or opportunity for wholesale renovation of churches. And the desire of certain aristocratic families to maintain prestige by maintaining earlier lavish donations to religious houses was an important factor in preservation. Moreover, objects

[82] See the link cited in n. 4 above for some recent roles of the Lüneburg cloisters.

and their settings can carry many different meanings. In the late nineteenth century, the novelist Theodore Fontane wrote of a Protestant women's foundation in Brandenburg whose major religious characteristic was virulent anti-Catholic sentiment.[83] And the historicist commitment of certain Lutheran foundations has been enhanced by twentieth-century events. The display of antisemitic objects at Heiligengrabe and Sternberg, for example, is due not to a desire to preserve the prejudice and violence of the past but to a determination to deplore it by refusing to erase it.[84] The permanent display at Wienhausen and Kloster Lüne of tapestries woven by medieval nuns owes something to the interest of museum curators in objects held by these convents and, more recently, to an interest in women's history. It is in fact correct to argue that the theory of *adiaphora* enabled pastors to use and reuse valuable medieval objects such as altars, vestments and liturgical vessels exactly because they could maintain that the meaning of the objects was not fixed. Because non-essential, they could be preserved and reinterpreted. Nonetheless, attention to the objects themselves suggests that they are not really inessential or indifferent. Nor are they treated as such either by recent historians who are revising our understanding of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chronology to stress continuity, or by art historians who are reinterpreting our sense of objects as actors, carrying their stories with them and eliciting certain responses by their very materiality.

Thus, the second and third questions generated by our paradox are part of the answer to it. In response to the query 'why survival?' we must assert that 'survival' itself is not the best term. Eucharistic chalices, embroidered frontals and elaborate carved altarpieces, like the crystal reliquary in the Riemenschneider altar and the statue of the resurrected Christ at Wienhausen, do not merely survive; they carry with them past devotion; they create and maintain space for piety. Although we can never know exactly what worshippers have in their hearts as they worship (nor perhaps do they know themselves), we have evidence from what people *do* that objects such as the grave Christ at Wienhausen and the crystal at St Jakob's in Rothenburg shaped response. The materiality of objects carries forward the experience of people in the past.[85] That carrying capacity—the way objects transmit piety and story—should complicate both our generalizations about chronology and our tendency to privilege texts (especially theological texts) in our accounts of religious history.

This article has joined some very broad discussion of theories of material continuity with three specific cases—the Holy Blood altar from Rothenburg ob der Tauber in south Germany, and two examples (the grave Christ and the holy dresses) from the convent of Wienhausen in the north. I hope that the cases themselves offer to the readers of this journal evidence and interpretation they have never encountered before, since some of the objects I treat here (especially the *heilige Röcke* of the Lüneburg Heath) are unknown to a wider public even of professional historians. But three cases, even when put in context, can never prove a generalization. They can only offer a model of how we might ask questions. Hence, I maintain only that the paradox with which I began should lead us to more lively attention to issues of periodization and of materiality.

[83] T. Fontane, *Der Stechlin* (1898), chapters 7–10.

[84] See Bynum, 'The Presence of Objects'.

[85] For thoughts on how body itself carries story, see C.W. Bynum, 'Shape and Story', in C.W. Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, 2001), pp. 163–89.

These are today pressing matters. Historians and the German public must decide how to celebrate the *Lutherjahr* of 2017, acknowledging how much changed and how much stayed the same. As James Simpson says, both medievalists and early modernists 'remain locked within their own synchronies, generating narratives, often unconsciously, around the magnetic rupture of the Reformation. It may well be that there can be no escape from the repulsive-attractive magnet of medieval versus Reformation'.[86] Nonetheless historians must try. Attention to objects can help us avoid assuming ruptures where none exist and enable us to see not only the early modern but also the medieval periods in new ways.

Moreover, the objects of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Germany should play more of a role in current art historical discussions of 'materiality'. The field of 'material culture' is not a new field at all, but it has recently been newly conceived by historians, art historians and literary critics.[87] Its renewal has stimulated a plethora of case studies, as one can see from the programmes of recent conferences on 'materiality'.[88] German historians have much to contribute to this inquiry.[89] Thus, I hope that the paradox of Protestant 'survivals' discussed here can join the feast of case studies we have been treated to recently. The larger questions posed here about chronology and response provide issues to keep in mind as we move toward articulating why objects, both in fact and in current theorizing, matter so much.

Abstract

The largest cache of medieval liturgical furnishings that survives is in Protestant Germany. This survival has sometimes been attributed to Martin Luther's doctrine of the 'indifference' of objects. Using several examples, one from south Germany (the altar at Rothenburg ob der Tauber) and two from women's convents in the north (especially some devotional statues and their dresses from Kloster Wienhausen), this article argues not only that religious objects are far from indifferent but also that they alter our standard opinions about the Observant Reform of fifteenth-century Germany and the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and suggest new understandings of continuity.

Keywords: Germany, medieval, Lutheran Reformation, material culture

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[86] Simpson, 'The Rule of Medieval Imagination', p. 24.

[87] See above n. 5.

[88] To cite two examples from the past two years: 'Medieval Materiality: A Conference on the Life and Afterlife of Things', 23–5 Oct. 2014, at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and 'Matters of the Word: Barnard College's Twenty-Fourth Medieval and Renaissance Conference', Barnard College, 6 Dec. 2014.

[89] Although some take a more theological approach than mine, a number of the essays in the volume edited by Spicer, *Lutheran Churches*, make a distinguished contribution to this new direction.