

Visualizing Religious Beliefs: Images, spatial contexts, and religious practice in early modern Europe and beyond. Interdisciplinary Workshop

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The aim of this two-day workshop was to discuss different ways of approaching the role of the visual in early modern religiosity. The papers by historians and church historians offered a wide range of examples not only from Europe (Britain, Germany, Bohemia, Italy, France), but also beyond (Peru, Egypt), and were commented on by church historian Andreas Holzem and cultural anthropologist Monique Scheer. Unfortunately, the workshop had to do without an art historical commentary which had originally been planned.

The papers and the subsequent discussions centered on three main aspects of the visual in Christian religiosity: the ways in which images (both material and immaterial, that is visions) were invested with meaning, the role of their materiality and spatial contexts, and different ways of their appropriation by contemporaries. The speakers drew on differing sorts of evidence, ranging from religious objects and images across archival and pictorial evidence pointing at their use to printed media like pamphlets and sermons.

Festival sermons describing ‘traditional’ processions can be interpreted as media of cultural memory which were used to form or redirect the religious knowledge of those taking part in the rituals as describes by FLORIAN BOCK (Tübingen). Inscriptions attached to religious imagery were used to limit their range of meaning, as has been demonstrated at the examples of apocalyptic depictions in important Jesuit churches in Rome and Munich presented by CORAL STOAKES, and religious scenes depicted on Bohemian

glass or dishes that were accompanied by texts presented by SUZANNA IVANIC (both Cambridge). As such, images and rituals thus seem to have been regarded as too ambivalent for being left without commentary. Such norms could foster the development of particular ways of approaching images that were specific for a religious order or the entire confessional group.

Nonetheless, such attempts at constructing discursive frames for pictorial meaning ought not to distract one from taking the mutual interrelation of images and discourse into account as Monique Scheer pointed out. CHRISTIAN KÜHNER (Freiburg im Breisgau), MARY LAVEN (Cambridge), Suzanna Ivanic and IRENE COOPER (Cambridge) presented religious objects as diverse as Southern German confessional boxes, Italian ex voto paintings, domestic religious objects, and rosary beads which were influenced by contemporary religious doctrines, but then also developed an agency of their own to generate meaning, an agency that was not least shaped by their materiality and spatial contexts. Mary Laven argued, for instance, that Italian Renaissance ex voto tablets were probably inspired by predella paintings showing saints’ miracles. Ivanic’s paper pointed at the potential multi-functionality of religious imagery on everyday objects in the domestic sphere, ranging from their practical use over the display of wealth to popular magic, and personal as well as family piety. In the case of popular religious imagery, one also has to take into account whether the objects were mass-produced or commissioned individually. On the other hand, in some contexts the materiality of a religious object did not matter at all, as FABIAN FECHNER (Tübingen) demonstrated at the example of the Eucharistic miracle of Eten in Peru (1649), where almost no material remains are left of the original church where it had happened. The first painted representation of the miracle was produced more than one century after it had happened.

The spatial context of religious imagery was taken into account in several papers. A close look by DANIELA BLUM (Tübingen) at developments in the bi-confessional German town of Speyer offered insights into how

differing attitudes towards sacred space and its imagery could manifest themselves in one building (the cathedral), which in the end resulted in a tighter separation of sacred and profane spaces in the town. One of the distinct markers of post-Tridentine Catholic sacred space, the confessional box, has been largely ignored by art historians so far. Yet, as Christian Kühner argued, they effected important shifts in visual practices within the church interior. While their use reduced the role of sight between the confessor and the penitent in favour of hearing, the box itself, placed conspicuously in the nave, became a constant visual reminder to confess. This case thus demonstrates the importance of studying visual culture in the context of the other senses, which also applies to the multisensory appeal of processions (Florian Bock).

How did contemporaries appropriate religious imagery? For Catholics, paintings of miracles could acquire sacramental character themselves as ANDREAS HOLZEM (Tübingen) pointed out. Among Lutherans, prophetic visions were described as having an overwhelming emotional effect on the persons receiving them, which in some cases could even be medially transmitted to those reading their printed accounts which were often accompanied by woodcuts. These accounts were, however, often clearly influenced by contemporary religious doctrine as well as by actual images in the local church, testifying to the formation of emotional reactions towards visions and images. On the other hand, the bodily signs of these emotional effects were, besides the concordance with scripture and doctrine, increasingly referred to as empirical proof of the authenticity of a vision. Protestants moreover tended to be skeptical of the reliability of the senses because of fear of the devil's influence on their functioning as seen in the presentations by SUSANNE JUNK (Tübingen) and ALEXANDRA WALSHAM (Cambridge). PHILIP HAHN (Tübingen) argued that this is why appropriations of images ought to be interpreted in the contemporary sensory historical context, taking not only vision, but also the other senses into account. The almost blasphemous 'experiment' staged by the Franciscans in Eten to prove the lo-

cal host miracle reveals that a tendency to rely on empirical proof can be detected in Catholic approaches towards visions as well, as seen in Fabian Fechner's presentation. The eighteenth-century maps visualizing the Exodus discussed by RENATE DÜRR (Tübingen) were the result of a Jesuit excursion to the Sinai peninsula that was meant to prove empirically the veracity of the biblical account, too.

Whereas this increasing reliance on empirical proof has to be seen in the context of contemporary natural scientific developments, ULINKA RUBBLACK's (Cambridge) paper highlighted the influence of a particular religious-political situation on the visualization of religious beliefs. For the participants of the 1530 imperial diet in Augsburg took great pains to avoid wearing clothes of the same colours as the other confessional party.

Consequently, in order to contextualize early modern visualizations of religious beliefs – either in the form of material images or visions – one has to extend the art-historical concept of the 'period eye' and put them in relation to the contemporary visual culture at large. Nonetheless, a specifically religious gaze can be identified, which is characterized by its strong link to theology, be it Lutheran or Catholic, apocalyptic or sacramental. It is, moreover, a potentially miraculous gaze, which is able to see the invisible, or more unexpected details than ordinary sight. Confessional differences may of course be detected like the Protestant emphasis of the Word as the preferred means of verifying a vision and the Catholic reliance on formal procedure. On the other hand, the Catholic sermons on processions or the text labels attached to paintings in Jesuit churches point at the use of text in order to channel the production of meaning of images, too. Furthermore, the workshop has pointed at the colonial extension of European ways of visualizing the religious which resulted in inter-continental similarities.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Theological positions

Susanne Junk (Tübingen), How to recognize an angel at first sight: Lutheran uncertainties about visions

Coral Stoakes (Cambridge), The Jesuits and Visualizing the Apocalypse

Fabian Fechner (Tübingen), The Body of Christ in Early Colonial Peru – Visualizations between Miracle and Empirical Method

Andreas Holzem (Tübingen), Commentary

Panel 2: Spatial contexts

Daniela Blum (Tübingen), Churches in Sixteenth-Century Speyer: Sacral Buildings and Religious Beliefs in the Scope of the Protestant Reformation

Christian Kühner (Freiburg im Breisgau), The confessional as a tool of Tridentine Catholicism

Florian Bock (Tübingen), „Gute alte Gebräuch ...“ – visualized space and arranged order in Catholic Baroque sermons

Suzanna Ivanic (Cambridge), Visual and material pious culture in seventeenth-century Prague households during recatholicization

Monique Scheer (Tübingen), Commentary

Keynote 1:

Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge), The Holy Maid of Wales: Visions, Politics, and Catholicism in Early Modern Britain

Panel 3: Creating Images

Philip Hahn (Tübingen), The power of images: early modern theories of sensory perception

Mary Laven (Cambridge), Picturing miracles in Renaissance Italy

Irene Cooper (Cambridge), Retouching the Rosary in Early Modern Italy

Renate Dürr (Tübingen), Count, survey, draw ... and believe? The debate on the Exodus of the Israelites in the eighteenth century

Keynote 2:

Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge), How symbolic was politics at the Augsburg Imperial Diet in 1530?

Final discussion

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