Saints and Sainthood around the Baltic Sea
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Identity, Literacy, and Communication in the Middle Ages

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Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Culture LIV

MEDIEVAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo
Chapter Two

The Elusive Quality of Saints: Saints, Churches, and Cults

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This chapter will present some problems concerning the relation between the medieval saints as they emerge from the sources and the lack of common congruence by which we, as scholars, discuss this material. Or, more directly, it will discuss the question: What is a saint's cult and how can the underlying structures beneath its many manifestations be characterized? Following the discussion, it presents some thoughts or preliminary observations concerning terminology which, to my mind, allow us to better grasp the research field in all its complexities without undeservingly skewing or favoring certain aspects over others. It will thus propose a slightly artificial distinction between saints as cult figures and saints as signs. It is the latter which is to be the main focus and the center of the present study.

The Complexities of the Cult of the Saints

The cult of saints has more or less always been on the scholarly agenda of social and church historians, but since the 1970s the research into this field has grown dramatically, and the number of volumes produced concerning questions of saints, sainthood, and sanctity is by now vast.¹ The trend is still going strong. The articles in the present volume, with their diverse presentations fixed thematically by a geographic setting, present a perfect example of the turns this trend has been taking over the last decade.

The large number of studies of saints and their cults ensures the continuous development of arguments and understandings in tune with contemporary research done in parallel fields. Nevertheless, a fundamental problem for scholars of the saints’ cults is the difficulty of reconciling
the many concepts or shapes in which we encounter the saints. The problem is two-sided: on the one hand, we have the widespread presence of saints in the medieval source material, where saints and saintly figures can be encountered in the most surprising contexts and can be completely embedded into everyday life, free from any obvious liturgical references. On the other hand, we find scholars applying special thematic emphasis to certain aspects of the material: the role of royal saints, saints and feminism, or saints and identity, etc.\(^2\)

In the following, I contest the value of raising such thematic and analytical questions or requiring such themes as structuring ideas for research. In fact, as stated above, it is positive to explore as many facets of the saints’ cults as possible. But at the same time, most scholarship up to this point has failed to explore the actual, underlying nature of the cult of the saints, which, I would argue, is critical to an understanding of the

Figure 2.1 Two royal saints depicted in the vault of Skive Old Church in northwestern Jutland (Denmark): St. Olav (left) and St. Canute the King (right). Wall-painting from 1522. Photo: By author.
phenomenon in all its complexity. It is this underlying level which I wish to address.

The saints’ role as personal protectors and helpers, each with a specialized area of competence, was a significant part of medieval cults. We can hardly overestimate the importance of the saints and their relics during the Middle Ages, when cults arose and declined rapidly, constantly providing new locations for pilgrimage and pious attention. This is such a well-known fact concerning saints and their cults that it is perhaps, at times, taken for granted, and this facet is prevalent to such an extent that some of the finer points of cults may elude us.

What I want to do at present is to encourage reflection about the way we address the importance of the saints’ cults without necessarily oversimplifying the role of saints in medieval culture and religious life. One such simplification which I specifically want to examine here is the notion that the representation of a saint—be that written or visual—always equals an expression of devotion to the saint.

Thus, it is a common assumption that saints were of tremendous importance. This leads to the conclusion that a saint is always equivalent to something important. For instance, when a group of female saints is found depicted in a church, one easily reaches the conclusion that due to the fact that saints are important, female saints might be understood to especially display or favor a female reading. The conclusion would in turn sum up the group of saints as constituting an important representation of sacred female presence.

A different, but very similar line of thinking could be that when guild brothers toasted the name of the one of the two Danish St. Knuds—Canute in the English form—it was a toast of importance, which obviously expressed the strong bond between saint and brethren. Or, one could point to a depiction of St. Anne on a spoon (figure 2.2). Again, one could argue that this exact spoon decoration was chosen because of a close link between devotion to Anne and the user of the object.

While the conclusions behind each example may or may not be correct, it is essential to note that saints were not only the recipients of devout attention, they were used as signs to communicate something in society. I shall try to develop this point further at a later stage in this chapter.

To support interpretations like the ones summarized above, it seems to me that a much more fundamental discussion of what the saint is or what the saint does is needed; that is, a discussion of what functions the saint fulfills beyond the obvious roles as patron and protector. The easy
answer would be that the saint bestows a sense of identity on the devotee, but how so and in what way? And how does this combine with the role of saints as helpers? Can we always equate the specific saint—e.g., St. Catherine of Alexandria—with the particular role saints played as intercessors, healers, and helpers, or is there a further layer to this? I would propose that this may be so.
A development can be traced in the role of the saints’ cults, from late antiquity to the early modern period, in which the initial status of saints as great, sacred personalities gradually also became a modus for communicating ideas about the broader notions of the sacred and the world. Thus, the saints developed from being solely spiritual helpers into both functioning as helpers of those in need and also as constituting a signifying system. In other words, we are dealing with two tracks within saints’ cults, which draw their power from the same source, but serve different purposes in medieval society. At present, I will not discuss the role of helper and healer any further. Instead, I shall focus on saints as a form of communication.

The Transformative Power of Saints

It may first of all be interesting to discuss why saints were at all interesting as a means of communication. What was the attraction of the cult of saints? I suggest that what could be called the transformative power of saints is a crucial component behind the way saints operated in medieval culture. By this I mean the ability of saints to alter the mind and fabric of the location where they were introduced, or at least the belief that the saints were able to accomplish this. One may say that when a saint is represented, it is perhaps not always out of a strong veneration for that specific saint but always with a regard to the effect that saints were believed to have. This distinction is important and I shall return to its significance in a moment.

To exemplify my argument, we can turn to the cathedral town of Lund in Scania. In the late fifteenth-century inventory of relics stored in the cathedral, a noblewoman named Kirstine or Christina of Gladsaxe is recorded as having donated two reliquaries to the church. In our context the second of the two gifts is of relevance. The reliquary itself is not preserved any longer, but it is described as a large silver image of St. Lawrence. Of particular interest is the fact that the cathedral was dedicated to St. Lawrence and the special significance of this choice of reliquary thus seems obvious. Nevertheless, things become complicated when we note what additional items the vessel contained. The reliquary was alleged to have stored six relics of the Eleven Thousand Virgins from the company of St. Ursula, who was martyred near Cologne; a relic of St. Gregorius Maurus or Gregor the Moor, along with remains of St. Cassius and St. Florentius, as well as St. Victor—all of whom were companions of St. Gereon, who like the previously mentioned virgins, were martyred at Cologne.
The form and contents of the reliquary seem in this case to have only a very limited direct connection. The shape of the vessel points to a local context, while the contents speak of different relations. However, rather than reading the reliquary as a specific reverence to Lawrence, we could interpret the vessel in a different light. One might interpret the vessel as a sign referring to something other than the saint itself. Perhaps we could see St. Lawrence as representing, or pointing, to that which empowered the saints in the first place. The reliquary thus becomes a representation of sanctity in general shown in a guise (St. Lawrence) of local significance. In this way, the vessel can first be understood as an emblematic representation of the Cathedral of Lund, housing the relics stored inside, and secondly, as a representation of the Church at large embracing the saints. It is not St. Lawrence as such or his depiction that is of importance but what he contains and represents: both Lawrence the church and Lawrence the saint contain the sanctity bestowed by God.

This is a subtle interpretation, which perhaps would be beyond the concerns of the laity in the town of Lund. Nonetheless, given the substantial amount of theological writing on the nature of saints and relics generated throughout the Middle Ages, such distinctions as these would hardly fall outside the intellectual scope of the cathedral clergy. And it would appear that there are certain instances in which the distancing of the representation of a saint from his or her vita and legends helps us to see hitherto unnoticed patterns in the medieval use of saints.

**Saints as Arguments or Statements**

Saints were petitioned by the sick, by those down on their luck, those hoping for the best, and those in spiritual need. But there was a different side to this. The St. Lawrence example demonstrates the first and most obvious part of my argument, namely that the representation or invocation of saints, no matter what their form or medium, is tantamount to an argument or statement. What argument they represented is a completely different question, which of course would differ from case to case. Different uses and contexts would spur different arguments. Saints depicted in coats-of-arms and seals pose one argument, while the liturgical commemoration of saints poses another. By considering saints as statements, we open up an understanding of the saints’ cultural role beyond their function as intercessors.
Images of saints are normally interpreted as devotional foci. However, by separating our conceptualization of the saints into two categories—on the one hand, saints as helpers, and on the other, saints as arguments—we are able not only to gain insight into the way saints were used outside the church, in contexts not traditionally related to devotion and liturgy, but also to examine the way saints could be used in church art. I believe we need to consider the use of saints in such rhetorical discourses in order to appreciate the dynamics and power behind medieval saints’ cults and approach how they, during the Middle Ages, developed into the omnipresent figures that survive in such abundance in the source materials up until the present. Or to phrase it another way, we need to understand how saints developed from being regarded strictly as venerated intercessors to being seen as argumentative tools, as a figure of thought, or as a means of grasping the concept of sanctity.

One way to show how saints were charged with meaning beyond their own individual sanctity, and how they could serve as references or signs, can be exemplified through the relationship between saints and time. The four evangelists could represent the four seasons; the twelve apostles could refer to the months of a year, while the individual saint might be understood as an allusion to his or her specific time in the calendar. This reference to time and season reached deeper than the mere reference to the specific feast day; it could also point to specific seasonal activities outside the church. To take a Danish example, a parish clerk’s chair from Hvidbjerg in central Jutland, dating from 1500–1525 illustrates this (figure 2.3). On this chair we find the two Danish saints Kjeld and King Canute carved on the ends. The feast days of these two saints followed directly upon one another, St. Canute’s day being on the tenth and St. Kjeld’s on the eleventh of July. The chair itself thus holds a time-specific sequence, but, furthermore, in popular sayings these two saints were said to set in motion the harvest in the fields, so that they also represented a specific reference to the beginning of a seasonal activity. Accordingly, the saints on the chair can be understood as pointing not only to themselves and their individual feasts, but also to a place in the cosmological time system of the rural community that surrounded the church. The saints, in other words, become emblematic of more than themselves; they become statements concerning how the world functions.

We can also turn to church art in general, where we perhaps find the best representation of this line of thinking and see how saints, not through personality or type, but through presence and numbers, made a
statement to the churchgoer. Saints adorned everything in churches from bench-ends to the walls, vaults, bells, and textiles. The significance of individual saints, both within the Church and in the personal lives of medieval people is undeniable, but I would argue that it is just as important, if not even more so, that the role of saints was to represent sanctity, or visualize the church as a sacred space and make celestial qualities apparent to the beholder.

In the medieval Church the major saints would certainly be honored on special feast days; the most important ones would even have several feasts. However, significant as each saint was individually, the idea of saints as a group entity had a strong influence in the broader theological framework. As an assembly comprised of different categories of holy men and women, the saints represented a heavenly population that emerged in the church as representatives of the splendors of beatitude (figure 2.4).
They testified to sanctity in the same way as angels did, but in a very tangible way, owing to their human shape and nature. Their number was a testimony to God’s glory, and a witness to the cosmic scale on which medieval piety operated. We only have to think of saints like St. Maurice and his legion of martyred knights or the above-mentioned St. Ursula and her similarly astronomical number of eleven thousand martyred virgins. In these groups, the saints appear almost with an allusion to military force, echoing evocative biblical imagery such as: “with mighty chariots, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place” (Psalm 68:17). The point is that, to a large extent, saints were rendered as a group and depicted in the church interior not as individuals, but as an army of sanctity. In the litanies, one saint after the other was named, followed by a responsive “ora pro nobis.” And, although they were ordered hierarchically, the litanies addressed the saints as a collective. The same was also the case during the liturgical prayer of the Confiteor, where we encounter the appeal to a united group of holy men and women.¹⁵

Figure 2.4  The interior of Lyngby Church seen toward the East. The walls and vaults are completely covered by scenes from the Passion and saints. Wall-paintings, ca. 1500–1525. Photo: By author.
Power rested in sheer numbers. This belief grew throughout the Middle Ages, where a corporation of saints such as the highly popular Fourteen Holy Helpers, a group of more or less well-known saints compiled into one singular unit of spiritual help, was reinvented in the middle of the fourteenth century. Whether we should define this as a liturgical way of thinking, or perhaps only as “inspired” by a liturgical way of thinking is an open question. Nonetheless, this manner of addressing saints, and thereby sanctity, is manifested in texts and images alike. On the church bell from Rimso in Denmark, dating from the fifteenth century, we read: “Help us God and Mary the mother of God help here St. Nicholas / help the Holy Trinity help the holy Magi and all God’s saints.”

When the bell in Rimso sounded, it called upon the entire community of saints at once. The same idea was followed visually as well, when saints were placed all over church interiors, on the walls as well as the furniture. This was, I contend, not to provide the church with devotional imagery per se, but to display heavenly splendor and “excite to the following of their example, in the same way that writing and letters do,” as the Danish Humanist and Carmelite Poul Helgesen wrote in 1528, in a defense of images. When parishioners lifted their eyes inside the parish church, their gaze would be met by numerous holy men and women, crowding the walls and furnishings, emerging as a visualized litany. The saints crowded the church space as witnesses and examples for imitation, encouraging each individual member of the congregation to strive and long to be among their company in heaven. As Bernard of Clairvaux writes in his first dedication sermon, those gathered in the church yearn as much for the company of the beatified souls in heaven, as those above yearn for the company of the pious souls below.

Saints as Representations

What I am problematizing is principally the one-sided identification of saints’ representations as expressions solely of devotion and cult. In applying only a cultic or devotional framework in the study of saints, we are able to describe just one side of the culture surrounding saints and sainthood in the Middle Ages; in doing so we fail to embrace the dynamics and richness that decades of research have revealed in this field. In addition, it seems to me that we fail to apprehend an important facet of how saints were utilized in medieval society. That is to say, we fail to see how saints filtered into all aspects of daily life and could come to adorn
any object, no matter how prosaic its purpose. By the end of the Middle Ages, saints, thus, seem to emerge everywhere and on everything. On the one hand, this can be understood as an expression of extremely widespread devotion to saints. On the other hand, it seems to indicate that saints could be said to express something else, something besides the cult.

In order to grasp this, a method or vocabulary is needed to enable us to discuss this whole spectrum of saints’ presence in medieval culture, without losing touch with the specificity of each context in which we encounter saints. We thus need to go a level deeper than the individual instances of the saint’s presence in specific places, texts, or images, and consider the theological substance of the saints’ cult at large. In so doing we can bring together the world of miraculous healing, pilgrimage and shrines on the one hand, and on the other the multitudes of other contexts in which saints also appear and are evoked.

But, before I continue, it would perhaps be relevant to address what a saint is. I do not refer to dogmatic definitions of sainthood or canonization, which though an interesting topic for discussion, lack relevance when it comes to the cultural understanding of the saint, which is what is at stake here. The question should thus perhaps rather be: What does the saint represent? Trying to give answers to this is crucial if we seek to understand the broader religious cultures which drew on saints and which certainly believed in some form of impact that these might have.

One way to answer the questions of what a saint is and represents is by encircling the issue of what the saint does. We could say that a common element in all representations of saints, whether they are written or pictorial, is that the saint is represented in order to convey something specific. The saint, as stated at the beginning of the chapter, poses an argument for transformation or indicates the potential for transformation. Examples of this are transformations by miraculous healing, the transformation of political landscapes through the power of the saint or, for instance, the personal transformation of a repenting sinner. The saint is a promise of change; “be like me and you will achieve glory,” seems to be the implicit message in any saintly representation. And this, one should stress, is effective irrespective of the form in which the saint was represented. Augustine of Hippo, one of the most prominent voices of the early church, expressed this idea very clearly and provided a road map for theologians throughout the Middle Ages. As Augustine states in Book 22:9 of The City of God:
What do these miracles attest but the faith which proclaims that Christ rose in the flesh and ascended into heaven with the flesh? For the martyrs were all martyrs, that is witnesses, to this faith. It was in bearing witness to this faith that the martyrs endured the bitter enmity and the savage cruelty of the world; and they overcame the world not by resisting but by dying. For this faith they died; and they can now obtain these blessings from the Lord, for whose name they were slain. For this faith their wonderful endurance went before, so that all this power might follow in these wonderful works.22

The Saint as a Metaphor

Alongside these facets, there is the specific devotion to the individual saints as intercessors, protectors, or helpers; in other words, the cult at its most specific, expressed through the shrines and relics visited by the devout who hope to find intercession and cures for their ailments (figure 2.5). On the other hand, we have the saints represented both in situations which address sanctity generally and in situations which could hardly qualify as devotional, but rather are representational in a much broader sense: as representations of spiritual qualities (faith, persistence, patience, etc.), concepts such as “identity” (i.e., patron saints referring to specific places), or simply as referring to something sacred and thereby conveying an almost talismanic power to the person or item. In other words, a way to bless all the “stuff” as Daniel Miller would define it, which surrounds everyday existence and constitutes the crucial components of daily life.23

While the role of intercessor is fairly straightforward, the other side to the cult of saints is more elusive. This elusiveness may come from the fact that when saints are used as signs, it can happen in two different ways. In order to comprehend this, we need to think of a concept that facilitates the openness of the saints as symbols: a concept which gives us a handle on the use of saints both inside and outside their devotional setting and qualifies this double use.

Above I stated that any representation of a saint can be conceived as an argument for transformation and change. Consequently, we are dealing with communication when confronting a representation of a saint. Furthermore, I have tried to distinguish between two modes of representation: a specific one, treating cultic devotion, and an open mode, using saints to refer to something other than the cult. The second mode, I would argue, involves two distinct, yet entwined systems of communication. One system
is based on theology used by the Church, while the other system grew from the first and developed alongside the theology-based system.

To define these two systems, as I have chosen to call them, it may be useful to refer to thinking about metaphors as conceptualized by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980. Proceeding from this work, I would identify the first system as a metaphorical way of thinking. Saints are conceived as representatives of something other than themselves, and
their primary function is to create understanding. That is, they are concrete expressions of otherwise ungraspable divine qualities. According to this perspective, from late antiquity onwards, the Church used saints as metaphors for sanctity or sacredness. This is continuously stressed throughout the Middle Ages, where dogma notes that one does not honor the saint him- or herself, but what the saint represents. In this system, the saint ultimately symbolically equals God, and when honoring the saint, one is in fact honoring God though the medium of the saint. The other system, I would argue, is a metonymical one. It is necessarily referential, but instead of showing one thing for another, the metonymic system uses
saints as a sort of sign constituted as a *pars pro toto*. It is a synecdoche based on saints; St. Erik as a *pars pro toto* representation of the kingdom of Sweden for instance (figure 2.6).

The saint as a sign is clearly a charged symbol, drawing its persuasive power from the believed holiness of the saint. In that sense, the metonymical system clearly rests on the metaphorical system and, to a certain extent, both systems benefit from each other. However, we may also note how these two ways of using or understanding saints can get in each other’s way. This has very much to do with the notion that the metonymical use of saints is much more closely aligned with the tangible, devotional understanding of saints as specific helpers and healers. A conflict between the metaphorical understanding of the saint and the metonymical understanding arises when the latter gains prevalence over the first. For instance, this may occur when a statue of the saint or an idea of the saint becomes independent of its metaphorical basis—i.e., as a sign of sacredness or divine power—and, through that, gains a power of its own.

The cult of relics is one way to illustrate this (figure 2.7). Thus, a constant concern arising from the firm belief in the miraculous powers of the relics was the problem that too much was attributed to the relic, while the connection between the saint from whom the relic originated and the divine was all too easily forgotten.26 These shifts in importance and attention would arguably take place all the time. The saint, the image, or the relic of the saint would gain prevalence and overshadow the theological backdrop of the cult as such. These shifts show how meanings behind saints’ cults were always up for negotiation, but they also demonstrate how easily the tangible manifestations of the saints could undermine the elusive theological basis for the concept of saints as a whole.

The constant pull toward investing more in the metonymical understanding of the saint is perhaps nowhere as visible as in the late Middle Ages, when the number of depictions, and indeed the very use of saints as part of everyday communication and sign systems, becomes present on a massive scale. It is exactly during this period that the profound critique of the cult of the saints swells again; in response, the Church began to strongly promote Christ and Eucharistic piety as an alternative to the massive presence of the saints.27 One can easily comprehend how the use of saints in the metaphorical system became encumbered or muddled by the prevalence of the metonymical system. Here the Eucharist proved a much more coherent and clear representation of the same thing saints were supposed to show (figure 2.8). Through this, it also becomes possible
to understand the comparative ease with which the northern European Protestant reformers were able to reconceptualize saints’ cults as a collection of examples of pious living and *exempla*—metaphors that is—rather than entities of their own. One such instance is when Martin Luther aimed to redefine the entire medieval concept of sainthood by rejecting pious actions as beneficial and raising all faithful Christians to the status of saintliness.\(^2\) As Luther famously states in his *Large Catechism* from 1529, in the exposition of the third commandment:
For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have. For though we had the bones of all the saints or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, still that would help us nothing; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God’s Word is the treasure which sanctifies everything, and by which even all the saints themselves were sanctified. At whatever hour, then, God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. \(^{29}\)
Concluding Remarks

It is my hope that by these various observations I have communicated some understanding of the nuances that should be kept in mind when embarking on the study of the medieval cult of saints. Taking these aspects into consideration helps to create a point of departure, from which it becomes possible to consider the cult of saints from a perspective that enables historical-sociological studies, while simultaneously helping maintain the theological backdrop of the entire phenomenon. From this perspective, it is of great importance to establish a discussion and framework by which we can discuss these matters—the nature of the cult of saints—in order to appreciate the complexities presented in the multitude of studies on the subject that continue to be presented and published.

NOTES


3 Important works such as Vauchez, Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages (2005) and Peter Brown’s classic study The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago, 1981) shed light on some aspects of the nature of the cult of the saints, but the emphasis on sociological and historical developments overshadows a basic discussion of how the concept of saints was utilized culturally.

4 For general studies see for instance Jonathan Sumption, Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion (Bristol, 1975).

5 See for example Jeffrey F. Hamburger, The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany (New York, 1998). It must be underscored that the works of Caroline Walker Bynum and many others have discussed the complexity of medieval notions of gender, and cautioned against
over-simple conclusions about gender representation. See the discussions in Car-
oline Walker Bynum, _Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the 
Human Body in Medieval Religion_ (New York, 1991) for further examples.

6 Recently the role of toasting St. Knud has been discussed by Lars Bisgaard 
S. B. Christensen (Danske Bystudier nr. 1) (Århus, 2004), pp. 249–69.

7 A specific example of this could be one of the many medieval spoons kept 
in the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen. See for instance the late medi-
eval silver spoon published in Erik Kjersgaard, _Mad og øl i Danmarks middelalder_  
(Copenhagen, 1978), fig. 123.

8 _Scriptorum rerum Danicarum medii ævi_, ed. Jacob Langebek (Copenhagen, 
1834), vol. 8, pp. 451, 455.

9 More information on the Cathedral of Lund can be found in Thomas 
Rydén, _Domkyrkan i Lund_ (Malmö, 1995).

10 The full text reads: “In magna ymagine argentea Sancti laurentii quam dedit 
domina cristina de glathsaxe. Sex partes de XI milibus virginum. Item de sancto 
gregorio Mauro. Item de sanctis cassio and florenceo martiribus, sociis sancti victorius,” _Scriptorum rerum_, Langebek, p. 455.

11 On saints in the cathedral milieu of Scandinavia see the study of Anna 
Minara Ciardi, “Saints and Cathedral Culture in Scandinavia c. 1000–c. 1200”; 

12 An introduction to the role of saints in liturgy can be gained from Rich-
ard William Pfaff, _Liturgical Calendars, Saints, and Services in Medieval England_  

13 See for instance Anna-Lisa Stigell, _Kyrkans tecken och årets gång: tide-
räkningen och Finlands primitiva medeltidsmålningar_ (Helsinki, 1974).

88–95.

15 Josef Andreas Jungmann, _Missarum Sollemnia: Eine Genetische Erklärung 

16 The Fourteen Holy Helpers were already known in the ninth century but 
their identities and fields of expertise were first defined later. The heyday of the 
cult was in the fifteenth century. See Joseph Braun, _Tracht und Attribute der Hei-
ligen in der Deutschen Kunst_ (Stuttgart, 1943), pp. 562–66; Hilgart L. Keller, 
_Reclams Lexikon der Heiligen und der biblischen Gestalten: Legende und Darstel-

17 The inscription is in German and reads: “help uns got un maria godes 
moder help her sancte nicolavs / help di hilge tre faldeheit help di helge tre kun-
ning unde alle godes hilgen.” Frits Uldall, _Danmarks Middelalderlige Kirkeklok-
ker_, 2nd ed. (Højbjerg, 1982), p. 88.

18 In Danish the text reads: “att optendis til theris efft   erfølling, som wij 
opweckis aff scrifft oc bockstaffue,” _Skrifter af Paulus Helie_, ed. Marius Kristensen  
(Copenhagen, 1932), 2:142.
In this way images of saints were used similarly to a host of different types of images with very different iconographies. Compare, for example, the present discussion with Margrete Syrstad Andås, Imagery and Ritual in the Liminal Zone: A study of texts and architectural sculpture from the Nidaros province c. 1100–1300 (Copenhagen, 2012), chapter 2.


For this see, for example, Conan Macken, The Canonization of Saints (Dublin, 1910); Vauchez, Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages and, concerning current reflections upon the nature of sainthood, Fabijan Veraja, Commentary on the New Legislation for the Causes of Saints (Rome, 1983).

Augustine, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans, trans. by Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, 1984, orig. 1972), p. 1047. In Latin, Sancti Aurelii Augustini, De civitate dei Aurelii Augustini opera pars XIV, 1–2, Bernardus Dombart and Alphonsus Kalb, eds., Corpus Christianorum series latina XLVII–XLVIII, 2:827: “Cui, nisi huic fidei adtestantur ista miracula, in qua praedicatur Christus resurrexisse in carne et in caelum ascendetisse cum carne? quia et ipsi martyres huius fidei martyres, id est huius fidei testes, fuerunt; huic fidei testimonium perhibentes mundum inimiciissimum et crudelissimum pertulerunt eumque non repugnando, sed moriendo uicerunt; pro ista fide mortui sunt, qui haec a Domino inpetrare possunt, propter cuius nomen occisi sunt; pro hac fide praecessit eorum mira patientia, ut in his miraculis tanta ista potentia sequeretur.”

Daniel Miller, Stuff (Cambridge/Boston, 2009).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago/London, 1980).

Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors, chapter 8.

See, for instance, Freeman, Holy Bones, chapter 22, for a discussion of medieval debates on relics. See also several discussions in the articles published in Reliquien: Verehrung und Verklärung. Skizzen und Noten zur Thematik, ed. Ulrich Bock (Cologne, 1989) and furthermore “Ich armer sundiger mensch”: Heiligen- und Reliquienkult am Übergang zum konfessionellen Zeitalter, ed. Andreas Tacke (Göttingen, 2006).

A sound introduction to the development of the Eucharistic piety of the late middle ages can be found in Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge, 1991).

Examples of this thinking can also be found in Luther’s De Votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium, written in 1521 at the Wartburg (D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 8:564–669).

“Denn das Wort Gottes ist das Heiligtum über alle Heiligtümer, ja das einzige, das wir Christen wissen und haben. Denn ob wir gleich aller Heiligen Gebeine oder heilige und geweihte Kleider auf einem Haufen hätten, so wäre uns doch damit nichts geholfen; denn es ist alles totes Ding, das niemand heilig machen kann. Aber Gottes Wort ist der Schatz, der alle Dinge heilig macht, dadurch sie selbst, die