

# Changing Senses of Sacrality: Foreword

REIMA VÄLIMÄKI AND KAROLINA KOUVOLA

In premodern world, sacral things were tangible, audible, visible, and even palatable. From relics and images of saints to prayer books, from monastic habit to coins hidden in magical purposes, this issue discusses the ways in which people approached, controlled and managed divinity in their environment. Many of the objects and practices had afterlives in addition to their original purposes. An image of a saint was ordered to a medieval parish, to be venerated as an intercessor on behalf of sinners. The sculpture remained in the church long after parish priests had stopped to encourage its veneration, but the parishioners would still attach magical qualities to it. Yet, in the course of centuries, the saint lost even these attributes, as well as its name, until emerging scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century started to attach new, national, scholarly, and aesthetic values to the sculpture.

The origins of this special issue of *Mirator* are in the conference ‘Changing Senses of Sacrality: Objects, Beliefs, and Performances from the Medieval to the Early Modern Era’ (1–2 December 2016, Helsinki). The conference was organised to celebrate the fifth Jarl Gallén Award, which is granted for an accomplished Nordic scholar in the field of Medieval Studies. The Award has been granted since 2004, and the previous award winners are Sverre Bagge, Monika Hedlund, Anders Andrén and Lars Boje Mortensen.

In 2016 the Jarl Gallén Award was granted to Professor Lena Liepe (the University of Oslo, Art history). Liepe has studied extensively medieval art in the Nordic Countries. Her current work is primarily on relics, while her second main field of research is on museum exhibitions of medieval church art. The conference touched, and the articles in this issue reflect themes that have been central to Liepe’s research, and in many of the sessions, we could benefit from her broad expertise.

The issue has six peer-reviewed research articles, spanning from the late antiquity to the eighteenth century. In the spirit of the international orientation of Jarl Gallén’s research, the issue discusses Nordic Countries but also provides a genuinely European perspective. Anthony John Lappin’s extensive and in-depth article surveys the re-organisation of emerging Christian Europe around relics. From the fourth to the seventh century, remains of the dead were re-aligned as the society was re-aligned, and translation of a saint’s body – which was (perhaps) originally an Arian practice – was adopted by Nicene Christians. Little less than thousand years later, the Western Christianity was again under reform, as the mendicants forged their position in the Church. Amidst the debate about the role of the mendicants, Thomas Aquinas re-defined the religious vows, moving from a juridical and material definition towards a more spiritual and sacral understanding, as observed by Agnès Desmazières in her article.

Two of the articles explore material remains of religious practices from the area that later became Finland. Katri Vuola, Henni Reijonen, Touko Kaasalainen, and Riste Saat study a sculpture of an unknown saint from Nousiainen, South-Western Finland. The research team subjected the sculpture to computed tomography (CT) scanning, performed in collaboration with Helsinki University

Hospital Medical Imaging Center. The scanning revealed a possible relic or relics, placed inside the head of the sculpture. In addition, based on technical, iconographical and stylistic analyses, the sculpture could be re-dated between 1250 and 1275, making it one of the oldest ecclesiastical sculptures from the medieval diocese of Turku. A different kind of religious culture and its remains are the topics of Sonja Hukantaival's article. She discusses traces of folk religion combining medieval archaeological material with the documentation of folklore from the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries. Fully aware of both the problems and possibilities of these two types of sources, Hukantaival's article is an ambitious contribution to the archaeological study of folk religion. The cases range from the objects of a Sámi shaman unearthed from the medieval city centre of Turku to a goat skull possibly used as a boundary marker between building plots.

The last two articles offer a view, or rather two different views, to the after-life of medieval saints' images in Scandinavia. Ragnhild M. Bø studies engagement with saints in Denmark-Norway before and after the Reformation. She uses the concept of propinquity to explore the different aspects of nearness that people may have felt for the images of saints, ensuring their preservation. Also, changes took place, transforming St. Catherine of the late medieval prayer books and sculptures to the Little Kari of early modern folk ballads. Finally, Terése Zachrisson explores how attitudes towards religious images changed in the post-Reformation Sweden. The sixteenth-century opinion of the images as *adiaphora* – external matters that in themselves were neither good nor evil – was replaced by the eighteenth-century condemnation of superstition. The clerical elite was in the forefront of condemning popular veneration of images as superstition or 'popish', while parish clergy generally retained a more indifferent position towards images and their role in popular religious culture.

The *Mirator* has been an open-access, online journal much longer than such form of publication became fashionable. As times change, it is time to reform also the *Mirator*. This issue is the first to be published in Journal.fi platform and we hope that the journal finds new readers here. As an entirely free publication, *Mirator* is done out of love for the medieval studies. The editors wish to thank the reviewers for their valuable work, and Glossa, the Society for Medieval Studies in Finland for its support. The financial support of TSV was essential in the final stages of this publication, enabling professional layout.

We hope that you will enjoy the changing senses of sacrality!

Turku and Helsinki, in die Sancti Thome de Aquino, a.d. MMXVIII