Jesus' Side Wound
Gender and Theological Perspectives on the Divine Body in the Middle Ages[1]

Dominik ŠTRBO

Abstract
The topic of the body, gender and sexuality as part of the discourse of the High and Late Middle Ages has been the subject of research by Western and Western-oriented scholars for several decades, and visual culture has been an integral part of it. The body of Christ, divine and human, mortified and resurrected, painful, sacrificial, procreative and sexual, is a pillar among the visual representations of the Christian Middle Ages. The vision of his body, present and past, is the subject of the present paper, which thematizes the intersections between sacred and erotic seeing/reading/contemplation, et cetera, of Christ's corporeality as a whole or its individual parts. It is Christ's side wound that presents a rich area for the interpretation of the associations and practices that a medieval viewer might have adopted towards the image of the saviour. The strict heteronormative subtraction of the sacred body is thus confronted with visions of medieval monasticism and priesthood, metaphors and models of identification, private and lay piety, or apotropaic functions that offer a particular view of Christ's body as transcending gender. In contrast to medieval thought, however, we also work with the vision of today's viewer, whose view of ancient art may be queer. By juxtaposing such perspectives, we aim to take research in new directions in the study of medievalism – towards a queer medievalism.

Keywords: Gender, Middle Ages, Visual Culture, Jesus, Wound

Introduction

The reconsideration of medieval images of the body of Christ in terms of gender or sexuality is not new in the field of visual culture. Despite the fact that in Central and Eastern Europe studies of this type have come only belatedly and in some cases with public scorn, gender research on medieval visual representations of the divine body is legitimate, stimulating and necessary in terms of de-tabooing the history of otherness and the vision of marginalised groups, whether through their own eyes or through the gaze of the norm.[2] We can conclude, in the words of Milena Bartlova, that the significant

[1] The present study forms part of the author's forthcoming dissertation.

[2] Our view and analysis of the selected works must, to some extent, consider the anchoring of the viewer in a particular time, space and society, facts that make it difficult (if not impossible) to unsee certain aspects of the artefacts under study. In the work thus established, the notions of autonomy and aspectivity of vision are critical for us. To what extent we can see what the image maker intended to pictorialize (the intended meaning of a picture), how our unique (and queer) knowledge consolidates our seeing, how to cope if we also see something else in a particular depiction, and whether the inevitable presence of our own perspective participates in the interpretation against the intention of the image, are all important methodological questions for our research, which we thus use to build on Whitney Davis's thinking. See: DAVIS, W.: *A General Theory of Visual Culture*. Princeton 2011, p. 157.

gap between contemporary and medieval views of the body represents an attractive field of research.[3]

Christ's body, specifically its depiction, its pictorial visibility, we understand here as a specific projection surface into which the medieval monasticism, priesthood, lordship or laity, believers in general (in the sense of creators and recipients), pressed their ideas and desires, needs and requests, their view view (or *gaze*[4]) and understanding of the world around et cetera. Jesus, as the central figure of the Christian faith, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), sacrificed himself for all people and should be accessible to everyone. In such an economy of the body, everyone has a "claim" on God, and everyone takes a certain position towards him. Jesus is to fulfil the role of a model of identification for all people. This function also applies to all women, despite the dominant patriarchy of the Middle Ages.[5]

However, the bodily ambiguity of Christ in medieval symbolism and art, as we will show later, could also shift this relation to the son of God to persons identifying outside the normative binary opposition of male and female. But let's go back to the beginning. What is the relationship between medieval images of Christ and contemporary gender theories? And what role does the isolation of the depiction of Christ's wound play here? Our usual stereotypical ideas can be shattered by the discourse of corporeality of the late Middle Ages, in which the religious representation of Jesus' body was intended not only to point out an aspect of its reality, but also to highlight it as desirable, to awaken the believer's desire for the body of Christ present in the Eucharist.[6]

Seeing and Reading and... The Wound in the Middle Ages

In what ways was Christ's side wound seen, contemplated and read in the Middle Ages? Eco claims that the medieval theory of allegorism attributed to the reading of Scripture (and later images) three other meanings in addition to the literal: allegorical, moral and anagogical. This theory, dating back to St. Paul, was elaborated by St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Bede the Venerable, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas and others. A medieval work viewed in this way is characterized by a certain type of openness. Each sentence, each image provides an open reading to reveal hidden meanings. The interpretation key could change for the reader during repeated readings. Eco warns, however, that in this case openness does not mean the vagueness of the message, freedom of reception or unlimited possibilities of form. In these works, it is about pre-given conditional possibilities that prevent the reader from escaping the author's control in interpretation. The interpreter has the opportunity to choose from ways of reading, from approaches to the text, but he always acts according to the rules – the rules of predetermined clarity. The meaning of individual symbols and allegorical figures was provided to the medieval reader in bestiaries, encyclopaedias and lapidaries, which conveyed objective and institutional symbolism.[7]

This ordered cosmos – the hierarchy of laws and beings determines the different levels (however) of the only possible understanding – the creating logos. Such an arrangement of the artwork equates Eco to an imperial and theocratic society. The rules of leading authority determine the rules of reading, guide a person in individual actions, prescribe his goals and at the same time provide the means to achieve them. The narrow spectrum of interpretations viewed in this way may not yet be quantitatively poorer compared to the interpretations of contemporary "open" works. A different approach and experience with the work also stems from the difference in time – from a different view of the world.[8] So, is it even possible

[3] BARTLOVÁ, M.: *Skutečná přítomnost. Středověký obraz medzi ikonou a virtuální realitou*. Praha 2012, p. 259.

[4] We use the term gaze here as a kind of "negative" sexual gaze or literally staring. In feminist theory, the men gaze is linked to the view of representations of women in art or advertising, in which the woman is a passive sexual object for the male heterosexual viewer. For the concept of gaze, see: BERGER, J.: *Ways of seeing*, London 1972.

[5] BARTLOVÁ 2012 (see in note 3), p. 269.

[6] EPP, P. J. G.: Ecce Homo. In: *Queering the Middle Ages*. Ed.: BURGER, G. – KRUGER F. S. Minneapolis 2001, p. 241.

[7] ECO, U.: *Otevřené dílo*. Praha 2015, p. 68.

[8] Ibidem, p. 69.

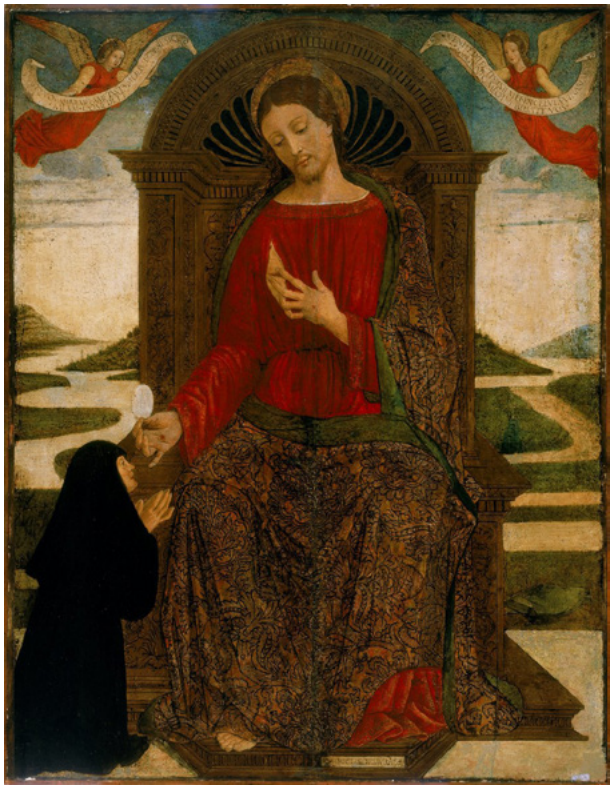

Fig. 1: Quirinthius of Murano – The Savior / Christ Showing His Wounds and the Host to a Clarissan Nun (1460–1478), tempera and oil on panel, 87 x 114 cm. Source: https://www.meisterdrucke.it/stampe-d-arte/Quirinzio-da-Murano/639340/Il-Redentore-dell%27Eucaristia.html

(following Eco) to look for gender meanings in the works of this period within the medieval recommended and institutionalized ways of reading?

"Gender-specific" spiritual themes, however, are found throughout medieval scripture and the mystical visions of both sexes. We encounter visions of a monk nursing the baby Jesus as well as female visions in which they are nourished by the milk of the Virgin Mary.[9] In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* Caroline Walker Bynum thematizes the specifics of a gender-oriented vision of Christ and, in particular, the relationship of women mystics to food and the Eucharist. Blood as transfigured milk and metaphors of the lactating Christ thus became instruments of biological identification with the male (and divine) body. Three main patterns thus resonate in the biographies of these saints: female fasting, feeding others, and eating extraordinary food.[10] In short, we can thus say that Jesus' body present in the Eucharist as food and his breast (or the wound in his side) in visions of breastfeeding participated in imagining Christ with the attributes of a female body. The gendered idea of Christ as food, however, also had another effect. Fasting, the manipulation and distribution of food, the miracles associated with food, and the visions of Eucharistic bread (fig. 1) were also feminine tools that circumvented the restrictions imposed by the church on women's intimate relationship with God[11], as well as instruments of criticism and regulation of those who wielded power.[12] But is this vision part of a devotional tradition that belongs only to women, is constructed by women and for women?

In the publication *Jesus as Mother*[13] Bynum describes the maternal aspects that were widely attributed to Christ during the High Middle Ages. Let's outline a few examples here. The mystic Juliana from Norwich (*1342) contemplated God in two ways. She understood him as a father (creator) who rejoices in his children and as a mother who is always willing to help her children and punish them if necessary.[14] Contemplating the passions, she perceived the torture of Jesus-mother as redemption, a promise of help against human sensuality, sin (Eve's?), which does not affect the whole soul, because it is a product of inexperience, and thus this sensuality fills only its lower part.[15]

The heyday of the image of the motherhood of Christ came even earlier, in the 12th century, on the

[9] BYNUM, C. W.: *Svatá hostina a svatý půst*. Praha 2017, p. 37.

[10] Ibidem, p. 183.

[11] Ibidem, p. 232.

[12] Ibidem, p. 238.

[13] BYNUM, C. W.: *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley 1984. On the feminine, and maternal aspects of Christ, see also BECKWITH, S.: *Christ's Body. Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. London 1996.

[14] BYNUM 1984 (see in note 13), p. 111.

[15] See WATSON, N. – JENKINS, J.: *The Writings of Julian of Norwich. A vision Shown to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love*. Pennsylvania 2007, p. 2.

part of Cistercian monks (men) such as St. Bernad of Clairvaux, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, Blessed Guerric of Igna, Blessed William of Saint-Thierry or the Benedictine Saint Anselm of Canterbury. Thus, Bynum deals with the answers to the question of why maternal images were suitable and popular for the monks of the High Middle Ages to describe God and Christ (and also the figure of the abbot who led the monks).[16] Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the Monologion combines in Christ the (binary) categories of parents – the mother, as loving, life-giving and threatened with death in childbirth, and the father as an authority who creates, rules and protects.[17] Christ's body is thus an accumulation of two opposites – it is divine and human, male and female. It is precisely the pain during childbirth and the real risk of death that is the bond/likeness between Jesus and the medieval woman. Christ gave birth to the church (fig. 2) from his (already posthumous) wound/vagina – he went through pain and death to give humanity salvation and the life of the church. The aspect of his torture and death thus gives relevance to a feminine reading of his body as the site (and image?) of childbirth. Motherhood was assigned to Jesus as a divine entity and a human man, based on his life-giving power, the creation of the church (ecclesia) and the provision of the Eucharistic food of his body, as a feminine and central category for Christian culture.[18]

As a mother, Jesus not only has a vagina, but other (biologically) female attributes are assigned to him – breasts and mother's milk. *Don't suck so much on the wound, rather the breast of the crucified*, writes St. Bernard of Clairvaux.[19] In these symbolic meanings, the nursing saviour is a tender mother nursing her hungry children. *Will a woman forget her infant and have no pity for the fruit of her womb? Even if she forgets, I won't forget you* (Isaiah, 49:15). Mother's milk can thus represent spiritual nourishment for God's children, but also the return of those who have gone astray to the beginning – *You have become those who need milk, and not solid food* (Hebrews 5:13). For Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, breastfeeding also symbolizes the preaching of the clergy.[20] In spiritual texts from Saint Anselm of Canterbury to the mystic Juliana of Norwich, Bynum finds three basic stereotypes about the woman/mother: 1. the woman is childbearing and sacrificial, enduring the pains of childbirth; 2. a woman is loving and tender in her love for her child; 3. the woman is breastfeeding, feeding her child with her own body fluid.[21] The trio of these mother concepts were suitable enough to mediate theological interests. The ideal of a female educator was anchored in medical theory and Christian symbolism in the High Middle Ages. From a medical point of view, breast milk was considered processed (transformed) blood.[22] A loving mother feeds her child with blood just like a pelican, a symbol of Christ.[23] This context is very important for understanding bodily transformation in medieval devotion. In medieval legends, such as St. Bernard's Lactation, blood and milk are interchangeable as bodily fluids, as are Christ's wound and bust. If we were to go deeper in the footsteps of the maternal interpretation of Christ, we could go back to the church fathers of early Christianity. Let us only mention Clement of Alexandria, who in his work *Paedagogus* describes Christ's teaching as breastfeeding with (mother's) milk.[24]

Apart from Christ's roles as son (God), father and mother, in medieval writings we also encounter visions of a penetrative character – sinking into his body.

[16] BYNUM 1984 (see in note 13), p. 112.

[17] Ibidem, p. 113.

[18] BARTLOVÁ 2012 (see in note 3), p. 267.

[19] BYNUM 1984 (see in note 13), p. 117.

[20] BYNUM 1984 (see in note 13), p. 118.

[21] Ibidem, p. 131.

[22] Along with breast milk, ejaculate was also considered a blood product. One of the main aspects of medieval medical theory was the theory of four body fluids – blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile. These liquids or their share or imbalance determined the predisposition to diseases but also the individual's personality traits. For medieval medical discourse, see: KARRAS, R. M.: *Sexuality in Medieval Europe. Doing Unto Others*. Oxfordshire 2017, p. 62.

[23] BYNUM 1984 (see in note 13), p. 132.

[24] FOUCAULT, M.: *The history of sexuality: Confessions of the flesh. The History of Sexuality Volume 4*. London 2023, p. 32.

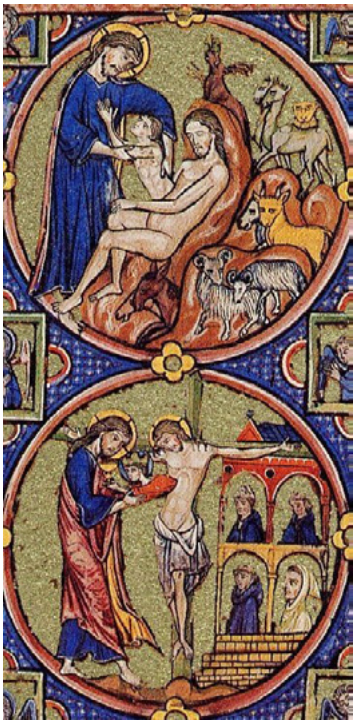

Fig. 2: The birth of Eve and the crucifixion of Christ/birth of the church (Ecclesia). Bible moralisée, Manuscript 344 x 260 mm, Paris 1225. folio 2v. Source: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL_2246547&order=1&view=SINGLE

A medieval mystical treatise from the 13th century by the Franciscan James of Milan – *Stimulus Amoris* – also deals with this topic. In it, the author describes Christ's body as a dwelling in which he wants to make a home and live from the fluids it provides. He feels the edges of God's wound, sucks its blood and sinks deeper and deeper into Christ's womb in anticipation of the day of childbirth, when Jesus will expel him to start the process again.[25] This literary work was very popular. The original text was expanded in the 14th century and became a common addition (either whole or fragmentary) to manuscripts of private devotion, for example as part of books of watches.[26] In his work *De Perfectione vitae ad Sorores* (1259–1260), intended for women religious, St. Bonaventure exhorts not only to imagine the suffering Christ, but also to touch him and enter into his interior.[27] Saint Camilla Battista da Varano (1458-1524), a mystic and Poor Clare nun, in the devotional work *I dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua passione* (The Mental Suffering of Jesus during His Passion, 1488) described the difference between seeing humanity and spirituality in the suffering of Christ. She compared those who find comfort in the humanity of the suffering Christ to a vessel with dew on the outside. Thus, they only touched the dewy surface, while they did not yet reach the liquid inside. The one who wants to taste Christ's pain must not just slide his tongue over the surface of the vessel and absorb Christ's blood from his wounds. Such an act would not satisfy the believer in question. Whoever wants to be truly satisfied (in the faith of the author's note) must go inside the vessel (wound) – deep into her (Christ's) heart and there he will find more than he could ever wish for.[28] The Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz also has an interesting and borderline speech, who describes in his vision that when Jesus kissed the

[25] SAUER, M. M.: Queer Time and Lesbian Temporality. Medieval Women's Encounters with Side Wound. In: *Medieval Futurity. Essays for the Future of a Queer Medieval Studies*. Ed.: WILL, R. – CHRISTOPHER, M. R. Michigan 2020, pp. 199–200.

[26] Ibidem, p. 201.

[27] "Draw near, O handmaid, with loving steps to Jesus wounded for you, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus nailed to the gibbet of the Cross. Gaze with the Blessed Apostle St. Thomas, not merely on the print of the nails in His hands; be not satisfied with putting your finger into the holes made by the nails in His hands; neither let it be sufficient to put up your hand to the wound in His side; but enter by the door in His side and go straight up to the very Heart of Jesus. There, burning with love for Christ Crucified, be transformed into Christ. […] Look for consolation in nothing else except in dying with Christ on the Cross." See: CHADWICK, H.: *Augustine. De Bono Coniugali. De Sancta Virginitate*. Oxford 2001, p. 145.

[28] However, the author further proves that she first wanted to omit this experience so as not to weaken the devotion to God of those who enjoy the suffering flesh of Christ. The spiritual survival of Jesus' pain requires the intellect – an ability that, as she states, not everyone has, especially not women. This remark thus opens another gender aspect of her mystical texts. For other works by the author, see: HUDON V. W.: *Camilla Battista da Varano. The Spiritual Life and Other Writings*. New York 2023, p. 191.

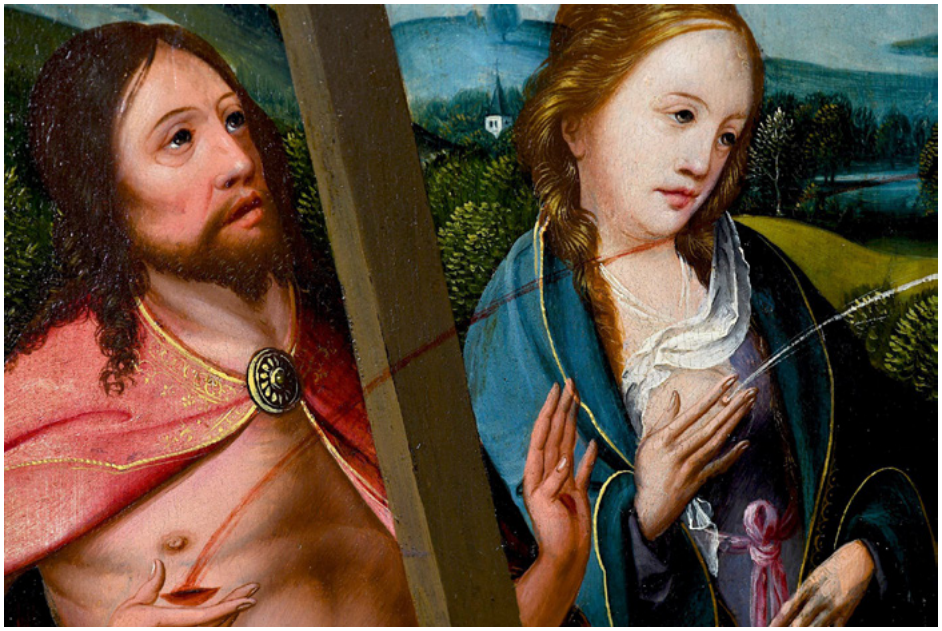

Fig. 3: Master of Adoration Antwerp – Triptych with the Crucifixion and Fountain of Life (circa 1505-30) – detail, Oil on panel, 119 x 172 cm, Source: Antwerp – Collection of The Phoebus Foundation, https://www.paulverheijen.nl/expo-body-language.php

crucifix, he opened his mouth so that he could kiss it even more intensely.[29]

Regarding the body of Jesus, it is necessary to note that depictions based on older tradition divided Christ's body into two parts: the upper one, which represents his spiritual essence, and the lower one, identifying his human (bodily) aspect.[30] Here, the generative functions are transferred from the lower part of the body to the upper part – that is, to the face and chest – where they are denatured by sexual inversion. Adam gives birth to Eve through his ribs, Jesus gives birth to faith through a wound in his side, and with his last breath a Christian releases his soul through his mouth in the form of a naked child.[31] The incarnation of Jesus is a state of exaltation of matter, the entry of the divine (unclosed, omnipresent) into a finite body determined by time and space. In this context, Jean Wirth, criticizing Leo Steinberg, draws attention to the fact that Christ's sexuality is of a supernatural nature and is not a manifestation of human nature derived from the Incarnation.[32] This puts him in direct opposition to the sexuality of men in medieval art. It remains questionable whether the rules of the spiritual transformation of the sexes (with Christ, the transfer of the female sexual organ to the upper part of the body – the wound) in this way put the breast of the Virgin Mary in the position of a phallic organ.[33] However, the blood of Christ and the milk of Mary, as bodily as well as divine substances, thus constitute the fluids of ultimate salvation for believers (Fig. 3).[34]

Jesus' body as open, transitory, offering entry and physical touch, is a wide field of possible interpretations. "And when we have bold confidence, brothers, that we will enter the Holy Place through the blood of Jesus, that new and living way which he opened for us through the veil, that is, through his body" (Hebrews 10:19-20). Bodily openings as such

[29] KESSLER, L. H.: *Seeing Medieval Art. Rethinking the Middle Ages*. Toronto 2004, p. 176.

[30] Ibidem, p. 75.

[31] WIRTH, J.: *L'image médiévale. Naissance et développements (VIe–XVe siècle)*. Paris 1989, p. 341.

[32] Ibidem, p. 324.

[33] Ibidem, p. 337.

[34] JONG, de M. Ed.: *Body Language. The Body in Medieval Art*. Exhibition Catalogue. Utrecht 2020, p. 76

were considered within superstition and magic, like doors and other entrances to architecture, as liminal zones to be protected.[35] The wound in Christ's side can thus be viewed as a (bodily) gate or entry portal into the architecture that is Christ's body. Through the believer's approach to Christ, the wound divides the space into outside and inside: outside – perhaps as the external (human) world, life in danger of sin, outside faith and love for Christ; and in – as a life of faith in Christ, experiencing his suffering, the promise of salvation and the possibility of merging with the divine – an ideal that cannot be achieved through the image of a wound, but which at the same time visually stimulates piety and inner imagination. Reverence for holy wounds thus moved between the concrete and the visual, and the desire to see them was the object of visions, images and human bodies, in extreme cases stigmatized.[36]

The symbolism of the heart of Jesus developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries out of respect for the wound on Christ's side. The presence of the sexual symbolism of the birthing wound in the side is completed by the symbolism of kinship: Eve arose from Adam's side (and the relationship with God is disrupted by the sin of the grandparents), and from Christ's side, pierced by Longinus' spear, the church arose, through which the second Adam restores humanity's relationship with God.[37] In the late Middle Ages, for the needs of the private sphere and piety, monastic psalters were developed into para-liturgical manuscripts, compendiums illustrating biblical stories, the lives of saints, but also containing various accessories, for example portraits of the owners at prayer,[38] as well as a calendar and prayer program for the Books of Hours. In the 14th century, the crucifixion became associated with the image of the pieta and was further deconstructed into the image of the suffering Christ or Arma Christi. According to Herbert Kessler, by appealing to Christ's human nature, images of this type were supposed to evoke compassion and evoke the whole story of suffering and salvation. The depiction of the naked, wounded Christ and the individual instruments of torture were to strengthen the contemplation of the Incarnation in a series of steps in order to achieve the fullness of transcendental survival.[39] Of course, the Image of Christ did not go without discussions about what it (really) depicts and whether it is even possible to see Christ through a work of art. The depiction of God thus became ambivalent: on the one hand, the ability to mediate divinity through images was rejected, on the other hand, depiction was a legitimate means of representing Christ's bodily experience. From the ranks of the church leaders there were many claims: Bishop Theodulf of Orléans considered the painting a pagan invention, St. Bernard of Clairvaux rejected the painting as such, and the Cistercians saw art as the lust of the eye.[40]

The almost naked, painful body of the crucified Christ is reduced in the illuminated manuscripts of the late Middle Ages to a dominating blood-red opening (wound) in the shape of a mandorla or diamond, which is complemented on a reduced scale by the Arma Christi, the instruments of torture. The wound in his side was caused after his death by a spear stab by the soldier Longinus.[41] It is therefore a person who "opens" God and, by eating the dead, participates in the promise of eternal life for all of us. The wound in Jesus' side, from which, according to legend, gushed blood and water, turned into a (female) womb – the bodily birthplace of the church.[42] As a reference sign, Christ's wound was separated

[35] CAMILLE, M.: *Image on the Edge. The Margins of Medieval Art.* London 2019, p. 16.

[36] BROWN, G. H.: From the Wound in Christ's Side to the Wound in His Heart: Progression from Male Exegesis to Female Mysticism. In: *Poetry, Place, and Gender. Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Helen Damico.* Ed.: KARKOV, E. C. Krakow 2009, p. 253.

[37] WIRTH 1989 (see in note 31), p. 323.

[38] KESSLER 2004 (see in note 29), p. 99.

[39] Ibidem, p. 155.

[40] Ibidem, p. 167.

[41] Gospel according to John 19,33-34: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his bones, but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."

[42] BARTLOVÁ 2012 (see in note 3), p. 266.

from the image of the suffering Christ and became the object of a new type of devotion, in which the spiritual and the physical, the emotional and the erotic, and ultimately the divine and the human were combined, starting not only from the dichotomy of Christ but also from the mutual relationship between man and by God. When looking at the wounds of Jesus in the manuscripts, the material of the work is also important, which emphasizes/strengthens the very effect and symbolism of the work. God sends his word and his (bodily) son to man. *And the word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). The parchment preserves the same idea – Jesus as a word/image/sign on/in the body of the parchment (animal skin). Blessed Hrabanus Maurus carries this similitude into an oft-repeated trope in the Middle Ages, referring to Jesus as the parchment on which the Holy Scriptures are inscribed.[43] From the point of view of Belting's three-step definition, the depiction of Jesus' body (or its fragments) merges/is identical with the medium of depiction – parchment.

In connection with parchment, it should be noted that the medieval experience of "art" was not limited to the field of vision. The works could be held, worn, smelled, kissed, (re)felt. For medieval materials, Bynum states that they were "pregnant" with meaning, thus emphasizing the sophistication of belief patterns.[44] The power of these images stemmed from giving the individual control over religious teachings and enabling individual haptic experience through their materiality.[45] Bynum also states that people of the late Middle Ages viewed parchment as living. Essentially a product of animal skin, it was believed to contain residual memory and power breathed in by the almighty. The ideas of the people of the time differ so much from ours if only for the reason that it was extremely difficult for them to consider any matter as dead.[46] The presence of a certain power was assumed already in the process of creating the parchment. St. Thomas Aquinas explained this process by admitting to material objects the potential of divinity embedded by God. By refining, objects could become divine, which made parchment a very important material that activated its power with the reader's touch. The image on parchment thus enhanced the idea of a living likeness, and touching the image of Christ or his wound (Fig. 4) represented the presence of his body.[47]

Kathryn Rudy talks about physical rituals and a personal bodily approach to Christ in the context of the late Middle Ages. Beyond the realm of public displays such as processions and masses, believers practiced private rituals with their own devotional books and images. Reconstructing these rituals is difficult. However, we can approach them through preserved instructions that prescribe the form of pious behaviour, its activities, sayings and props, and through traces of wear on the objects themselves, which testify to their use. Many of the rituals of lay believers reveal ways of using and accessing the manuscript that represented (represented, presented?) the body of Christ. Believers were directly encouraged to cultivate a physical relationship.[48] Late medieval Christians physically communicated with objects of private devotion in the desire to achieve supernatural effects. One of the forms of physical access to the object was the kiss or devotional osculation of the image or divine word, which was supported by the image of the priest kissing the missal and the faithful kissing the pacific, both during mass.[49]

Michelle Sauer claims that the possible (homo) erotic relationship between the readership and the feminized depiction of Christ's side wound is based precisely on haptics, on the experience of touch.

[43] KESSLER 2004 (see in note 29), p. 27.

[44] BYNUM, C. W.: *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. Brooklyn 2011, p. 58.

[45] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 209.

[46] BYNUM 2011 (see in note 43), p. 112.

[47] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 210.

[48] Geert Grote of Deventer (1340–1348), theologian and North German reformer, gave instructions on how to interact with Christ's body, in connection with kissing the pacific. When worshiping Christ, he recommended experiencing more carnality. On this subject, see: RUDY, K. M.: Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges and Carrying Talismans: Considering Some Harley Manuscripts through the Physical Rituals they Reveal. In: *Electronic British Library Journal* [online]. London 2011, p. 1.

[49] Ibidem, p. 2.

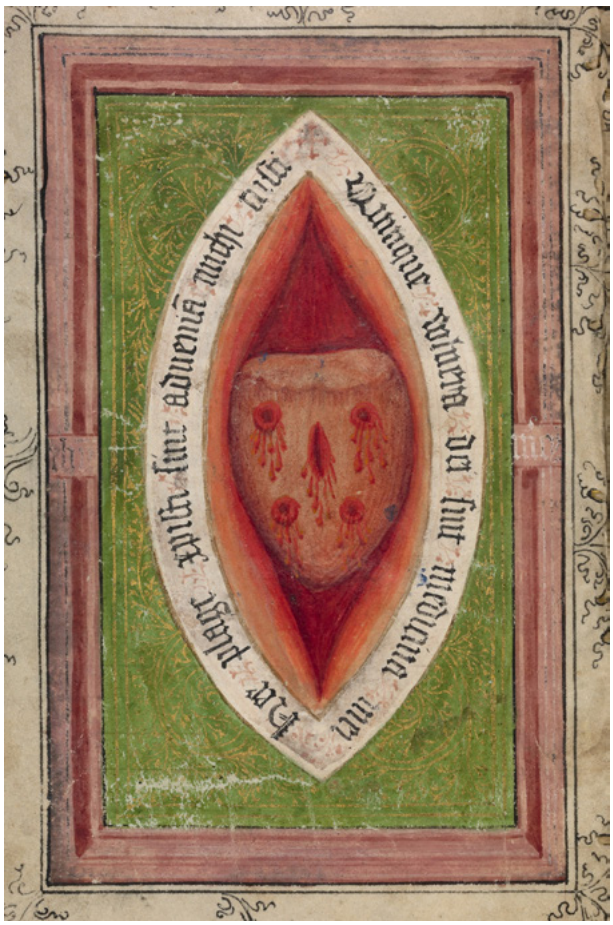

Fig. 4: The wound as vagina? Bodleian Library MS. Lat. liturg. f. 2, Manuscript, dating 1390 – 1410, France or Flanders, folio 4v. Source: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/

Individual senses were involved in handling the manuscript – the writing was read aloud (sight/voice), literally chewed (taste), the reader could touch it (touch), smell it (smell), kiss it (touch/taste) – to become a mediator of one's own religious ritual, the sensory gradation of which could strengthen the religious experience. At this point, Sauer understands visuality and materiality as flexible concepts. Visual/visibility becomes visuality when it refers to the entire complex of production, perception and cultural sites of the story. Material/media becomes materiality if it refers to the means of production and materials used and their typical proliferations.[50]

As Davis says, although the name of visual culture already implies the activity of seeing, artifacts created with the aim of being visible and deliberately controlled from the point of view of their comprehensible aspect, visual culture should also be investigated from the point of view of touching (haptic), movement, smell (smell), tasting (kissing).[51] When examining historical images, we can correct our vision. But even its adjustment does not give us the opportunity to see the images as uncorrected in there, inaccessible to us, visual world. However, it gives us the ability to enter the circle of visuality, even if at the opposite end to the historical participants of the given visual culture.[52] We can find the foundations of visuality in the ways of sensory perception and awareness as well as in the operations of thinking – in calibrations and comparisons that do not necessarily include visual functions even if they recursively coordinate vision. Thus, the body participates (and has participated) in the perception of the visible, from proprioception of the retina to mnemonic sensory representation. Visuality thus becomes a trans-reflexive approach in seeing.[53]

From the eleventh century, the heart of Christ gradually became the focal point of the connection between the believer and the Savior. In addition to the desire for the concrete and the visual, the long-standing devotion to the wounds stimulated a desire for the physical, imaginative, and meditative.[54] The image of the suffering Christ was articulated by guided meditations, encouraging believers to experience/contemplate Christ's passion.[55] Rosalynn Voaden points out the fact that the discourse of the Sacred Heart draws on the imagery of biologically feminine characteristics such as flow, blood, opening,

[50] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 209.

[51] DAVIS 2011 (see in note 2), p. 122.

[52] Ibidem, p. 257.

[53] Ibidem, p. 278.

[54] LEWIS, F.: The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and the Response. In: *Women and the Book*. Ed.: SMITH, L. – TAYLOR, J. Toronto 1997, p. 209.

[55] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 202.

closing...[56] The similarity between Christ's (childbirth) suffering and the experience of "femininity" thus inspired a special feminine respect. Saints Gertrude of Helfa (1256-1302) and Mechtilda of Hackeborn (1240/41-1298) were among the important nuns who are credited with shifting the emphasis from the wound in the side to the Sacred Heart. Christ's wounds are also an important part of hermit literature. They enable mimetic overlaps – bodily identification and purification of hermits/chocks striving for contemplative fusion with Christ.[57] Saint Augustine already said that the real contemplation of the saviour takes place through the idea (vision/mental image) of the crucified Christ in the heart of the contemplator.[58] In a letter to the nuns of the monasteries of San Gaggio and Monte San Savino, Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) writes that she longs to see them hidden and enclosed in the side of the crucified Christ.[59]

Christ's wound in the side represents the refuge, the conjugal bedroom, the breast that nourishes and provides erotic pleasure, the womb of man's rebirth into eternal life, it is the lips that kiss, the storehouse of mystical instruments, the well of living water, the spring of blood that washes away the sin of the ancestors, the attribute of the new Adam...[60] According to Sauer, medieval literary comparisons of hermits to doves drinking from the chalice and pecking the Eucharistic bread develop an oral-erotic game. The hermit kisses the wound, licks it, nibbles it, passionately sucks it, hides and enters it. In these approaches, the lips of the believer adore Christ's vaginally shaped wound in sacral-sexual sensual images. These scenes of pleasure describe the practice of divine and queer (lesbian) cunnilingus.[61] The act of stepping into Christ's wound is described by Amy Hollywood as a transformation of vision into effect—a place of ecstatic *jouissance*.[62,63] Passionate blood-sucking also appears in a text for monks from the 15th century.[64] Although the lesbian meaning is lost in the monastic presentation, we can still understand it as queer – the male (monastic) reader finds ecstasy in the idea of sucking Christ (his wounds) in a gender shift that arises from the adaptation of female-oriented texts to a male audience without significant changes.[65] We can also talk about the intersection between sacred and homoerotic reading, or about a kind of cross-dressing[66] of the soul, in which the monks, through the compilation of texts intended for women, identify themselves with female actions and pronouns – experiencing a kind of trans-moment. The late-medieval devotional images of Christ's side wound, related to the contemplation of his passion, surprise not only with their resonance with the vulva/vagina, but also with their visual intensity.[67] The image, the body and the medium of Christ are thus interconnected, and the repetition of touches and kisses enabled access to the divine on

[56] VOADEN, R.: All Girls Together. Community, Gender, and Vision at Helfta. In: *Medieval Women in their Communities*. Ed.: WATT, D. C. Cardiff 1997, p. 74.

[57] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 203.

[58] CHADWICK, H.: *Augustine. De Bono Coniugali. De Sancta Virginitate*. Oxford 2001, p. 145.

[59] NOFFKE, S.: *The Letters of Catharine of Siena*, *Letter 62*, Tempe 2000, pp. 196–197.

[60] GRAZIANO, F.: *The Wounds of Love. The Mystical Marriage od Rose of Lima*. Oxford 2004, p. 205.

[61] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 205.

[62] HOLLYWOOD, A.: The Glorious Slit: Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound. In: *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture*. Ed.: KRIER, T. – HARVEY, D. E. New York 2004, p. 106.

[63] Jouissance as pleasure, ecstasy, physical or intellectual pleasure and thus, in this context, the pleasure of reading a text and its mystical contemplation.

[64] It is the text A Talkyng of the Loue of Gode, adapted from the 13th century hermit text written for women – The Wooing of Our Lord, as well as from the text An Exceedingly Good Orison to God Almighty, parts of the book Liber Meditatio et Oratioum attributed to St. to Anselm.

[65] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 205.

[66] Cross-dressing – The practice of dressing in clothes considered appropriate for the opposite sex, i.e. women in men's clothes and men in women's clothes. See: https://glosar.aspekt.sk/default.aspx?ami=1&smi=1&vid=129. [cit. 2023-02-07]

[67] SAUER 2020 (see in note 25), p. 206.

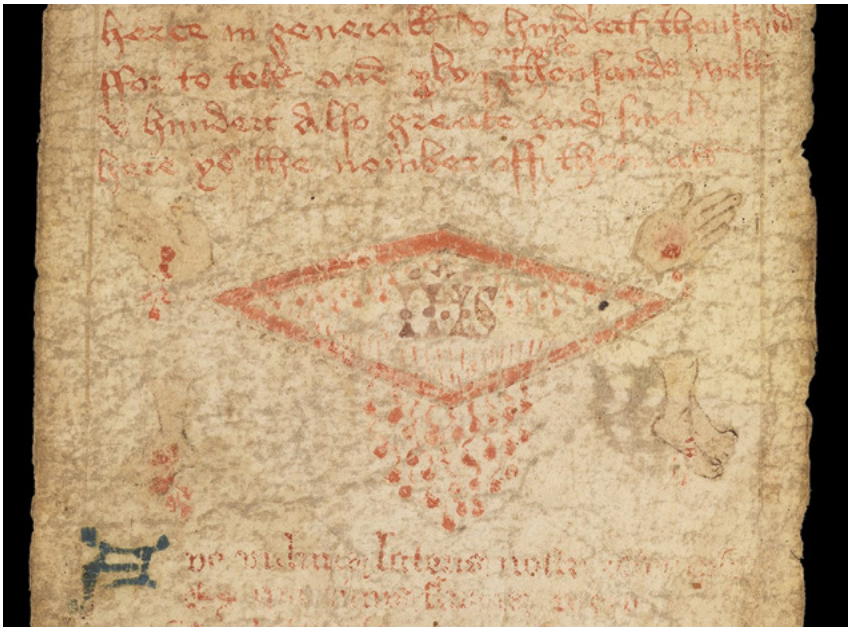

Fig.5: Birth scroll – Wellcome MS 632, c. 1500, the dripping side-wound detail. Source: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.202055

an intimate level. Apart from stereotypical ideas, we can also perceive the Christian Middle Ages as a field of radical destabilization of traditional differences and hierarchies, thanks to numerous sources of contemporary thinking about sex, sexuality and divinity.[68]

Side Wound in Medieval Manuscripts. A Few Examples

Birth Scroll – Wellcome MS 632

A three-meter-high (332x10cm) scroll of sheep parchment made of four sewn strips originating from late medieval England at the end of the 15th century is an interesting example of the appearance of the depiction of Christ's wound on an object used in bodily-sacred-apotropaic contexts (Fig. 5). The surface of the parchment, largely torn off, illegible in some passages, is covered by prayers and invocations of saints[69] (e.g. to Saints Cyric and Julitta) in Latin and English and depictions exclusively related to the theme of the Passion of Christ – arma christi. Among them are the crucifix, parts of Christ's body—specifically pierced torso representations of arms and legs with bleeding wounds, and between them a rhombus-shaped[70] side wound with the IHS monogram, highly abstracted, bleeding, and

[68] Ibidem, p. 213.

[69] For specific texts on parchment, see: https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mwzwv2m7. [cit. 2023-03-09]

[70] As for the rhombus, its schematic representation in the Czechoslovak environment is also interesting for us. A vertically placed rhombus on one of the sharp peaks with a line in the middle and sometimes complemented by radial lines around it, representing pubic hair, is a widely known (and derogatory) symbol of female genitalia in our environment, which we encounter from inscribed school desks to graffiti in public spaces. The rhombus in the meaning of the vulva in the Czechoslovak environment was dealt with by the sociologist Rudolf Šmíd, who considers it purely a phenomenon of Central Europe. See: https://g.cz/tema/phdr-rudolf-smid/. [cit. 2023-03-09] However, this statement does not work with the history of depicting the female womb. Schematic depictions of the vulva (mandorla-shaped, triangular, diamond-shaped, and others) have been known since the Palaeolithic. See: GOODE, S.: Icon of the Vulva, A Basis of Civilization. In: *Journal of Archaeomythology,* 10, 2021. pp. 87 – 118. A rhombus shape can also represent a diamond. In this context, René Smeets talks about the representation of a diamond placed in a square. According to the author, the diamond is an ancient symbol of the power of creation, the life-giving womb, which was granted to a woman by God; here protected by the masculine sign of the square. SMEETS, R.: *Signs, Symbols &*

enlarged against the limbs depicted. The font and simple paintings are rendered in red and black. On the reverse side of the parchment, it is written that its length is equal to the height of the Virgin Mary, on the front side, in the place where the cross should have been shown, there is an inscription preserved, which states that by multiplying its length fifteen times, we get the actual length of our Lord. Referring to the scale of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the object itself was a tangible union of the two bodies. Likewise, its text promises protection to both sexes from death in battle, plague, sudden death, robbery, and the like, if the user of the scroll recites certain prayers and carries it with them.

Sexon claims that the special function of the scroll was intended for women in childbirth. At that time, it represented a birth protective belt to ensure a safe conception and with it a promise of successful fulfilment of the proper duties – baptism and purification of the mother in church. Interaction with the scroll was distinctly haptic. The scroll was to be placed around the belly of the mother, the image and the body of Christ (the body of the parchment, or the parchment as a body) and the body of the mother were in mutual interaction. However, it was not just an apotropaic meaning. The body of the mother was likened to the body of Christ by using a birth belt. The pain and suffering of a woman in labour thus became mimetic of Christ's suffering on the cross. Thus, the idea of a specifically tuned *imitatio christi* is offered, in which the model of (spiritual?) childbirth for the mother is a feminized image of Christ. Such a depiction of Jesus' body, specifically the wound, can destabilize the understanding

of his body in binary categories. His wound, articulated at the level of pain associated with childbirth, turns into the womb of Jesus as the mother of the church.[71] Sexon thus summarizes that the user of the scroll confronts Christ's suffering as transcending gender. Thus, to some extent, it supports the idea of a non-binary idea of Christ. The depiction of the wound on the side also provides an opportunity for a specifically female empathy – the feeling of birth pains, pains specific to the female body and female genitalia, which find their foreshadowing in the male-coded body of Christ.[72]

Current research outside the field of humanities is also dealing with the evidence of the function of the parchment strip with the wound of Christ depicted. In this context, biomolecular analysis is an important source of knowledge. Through paleoproteomics[73], Sarrah Fiddyment and team took samples from the manuscript that confirmed the presence of both human and non-human peptides.[74] A large amount of the obtained human peptides comes from cervicovaginal fluid.[75] This confirms the

Ornaments. New York 1982, p. 56. In Juan E. Cirlot's dictionary of symbols, the rhombus is a symbol of the female genital organ, a Greek magical instrument of a fetishist nature, which was used to arouse and inflame male passions. The author also considers the rhombus to be a dynamic sign indicating the connection between lower and higher, such as e.g. in Andrew's cross. See: CIRLOT, J. E.: *A Dictionary of Symbols*. 2001 [online]. Available at: https://chinhnghia.com/dictionary_of_symbols.pdf. [cit. 2023-03-11] In the Middle Ages, the spear with which Christ's side was pierced often has a rhombus shape (not only). Thus, a parallel arises between the rhombus spear, Christ's rhombus wound – the womb, and the well-known symbol for female genitalia in our environment, which is hard not to see in the works we are dealing with here. However, our personal experience should not obscure the fact that the rhombus may not have had the same meaning for the medieval viewer.

[71] SEXON, S.: Gender-Querying Christ's Wounds. A Non-Binary Interpretation of Christ's Body in Late Medieval Imagery. In: *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*. Ed.: SPENCER-HALL A. – GUTT, B. Amsterdam 2021, p. 138.

[72] Ibidem, p. 139.

[73] Paleoproteomics, the study of ancient proteins, is a rapidly developing field at the intersection of molecular biology, palaeontology, archaeology, paleoecology, and history. Paleoproteomic research uses the longevity and diversity of proteins to investigate fundamental questions about the past. On this topic see: WARRINER, Ch. – RICHTER K. K. – COLLINS J. M.: Paleoproteomics. In: *Chemical Reviews,* 122, 2022, No. 16, pp. 13401 – 13446. [online]. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9412968/. [cit. 2023-03-01]

[74] A peptide is a molecule that contains two or more amino acids (molecules that join together to form proteins). Peptides that contain many amino acids are called polypeptides or proteins. [online]. Available at: https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Peptide. [cit. 2023-03-01]

[75] Cervicovaginal – relating to the cervix and vagina.

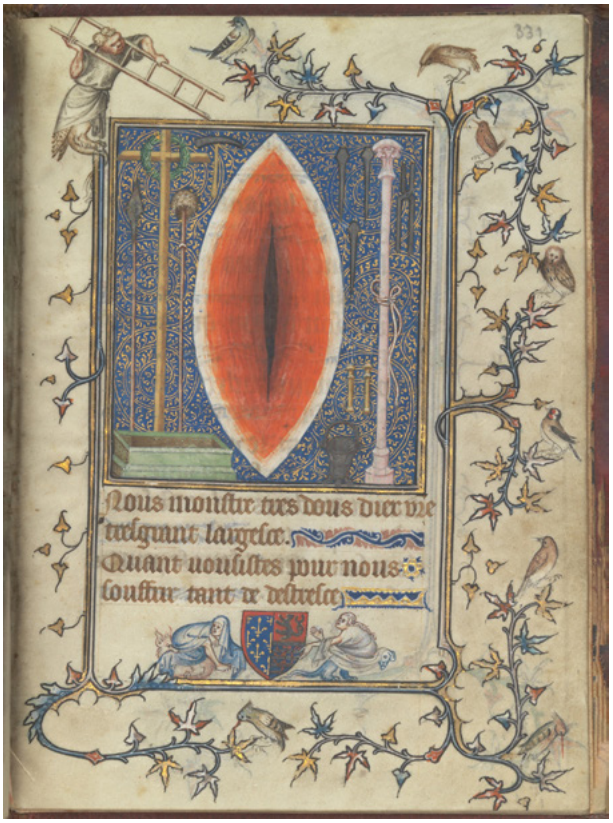

Fig. 6. The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy – Folio 331r. Attributed to Jean Le Noir, before 1349. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Arts, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471883

supposed function of the medieval parchment as a birth belt with protective magico-religious properties, which was used to gird the pregnant woman's loins.[76] The invocation of saints and special rituals are tied to the high mortality of the mother and child at the time. Although Christ's wound forms only a tiny part of the three-meter scroll, along with its entire double-sided system of prayers and abdications, its presence (and corporeality – the body of the parchment) and its connection to the female body in labour gives us a broader idea of the insight into pain and the capacity for deep bodily and gender-transcending identification of a medieval childbearing woman with the body of a son of God.

The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg – Folio 331r

Another depiction of Jesus' side wound can be found in the prayer book of the Czech princess and Norman duchess Bonne of Luxemburg (Fig. 6).[77] Dated around 1349 and attributed to the illuminator Jean Le Noir,[78] this illuminated manuscript from Paris, measuring 13.2 x 9.7 cm, was made for Bonne, wife of John, Duke of Normandy. The small format of the manuscript suggests an intensely personal and private relationship, such as was recommended for owners of similar books.[79] Manuscript is a luxury elite order. The coat of arms of the duchess, mother of the French king Charles V, is shown in the manuscript on thirteen pages and thus indicates the original owner of the book.[80] The book itself contains a calendar, psalter and prayers in Latin, and a series of devotional readings and prayers in French. It is decorated with fourteen half-page miniatures, thick leaf borders, marginalia, illuminated initials and line fillings.[81] Among the first half of the miniatures are scenes such as David fighting Goliath, three singing clerics or a depiction of the Holy Trinity. The vernacular part of the book begins with the passion cycle, we find here a scene of betrayal and arrest, but also a text about the six degrees of mercy, a poem Three dead and three alive, accompanied by

[76] FIDDYMENT, S. et al.: Girding the loins? Direct evidence of the use of a medieval English parchment birthing girdle from biomolecular analysis. In: *Royal Society Open Science*, 8, 2021, No. 3. [online]. Available at: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.202055. [cit. 2023-03-02]

[77] The Book of Prayers of Bonne of Luxemburg is part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. See: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471883.

[78] Although the use of grisaille (a term for monochrome painting techniques) for the figures, the richly coloured, decorative background and marginal paintings reflect the influence of Jean Pucello, the author of the Hours of Jane d'Evreux in the Cloisters Collection.

[79] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 143.

[80] LERMACK, A. I.: *Fit for a Queen: The Psalter of Bonne of Luxembourg at the Cloisters. PhD. Thesis*. Iowa 1999, p. 2.

[81] Ibidem, p. 7.

miniatures. The last text consists of a series of verses contemplating the crucifixion and the five wounds of Christ. It is first accompanied in the beginning by a miniature (folio 328r.) showing a pair of men and women, probably Bonna and her husband, kneeling under a crucifix[82], on which Christ, as Sexon says, directs attention to his wound with an elongated phallic finger and calls for contemplation.[83]

In the middle of this meditative text, immediately before the verses dedicated to the side wound, there is a final miniature of the isolated side wound, removed from the holy body. It has the form of a vertically built blood-red slit, almond or almond-shaped, which in the central joint in the middle indicates the depth of the penetration. The hierarchical representation of the wound is completed by the arma christi in a reduced scale on both sides of it on a blue background with a gold leaf ornament. The vertical depiction of the wound in the manuscript evokes female genitalia.[84] Whether such an ambiguous reading was intentional (and visible) or whether the resemblance to a vagina is just a matter of chance (or our projection) and the contemporary viewer/reader (and thus the owner, Bonna) did not notice this fact is the subject of our interest. Michael Camille drew attention to the similarity of this wound to a vagina and its associations with images of penetration and childbirth.[85] In this regard, Ruth Mazo Karras says that for medieval people, the vulva may have looked more like a wound than a wound (of Christ, or a depiction of her) than a vulva.[86] David Areford argues that the people of the late Middle Ages believed that the size of the images of the side wound corresponded to the actual size of Christ's wound. At the same time, he considered this depiction, a relic in a certain sense, to be the culmination of the devotional program of Bonne of Luxemburg's book.[87] However, Annette Lermack pointed out that the authors of these interpretations isolated this work within the manuscript and compared it with similar images, not noticing that the book of watches has its own devotional program and that this work is located in relation to a certain text.[88] William Land also offered an interesting interpretation, although it is based on an unprovable incident from his private life. He argues that the illustrations in the manuscript refer to the owner's adultery and the illegitimate child she had to give up. However, this period rumour could only be propaganda, created to discredit the Valois family.[89]

In relation to gender interpretations, Sexon talks about directing the gaze and lurring the boundaries between subject and object. The transition between pages 328r and 331r is also a transition from identifying oneself with the image of the patrons (328r) to perceiving oneself as part of the body of Christ (331r). According to the author, the marginal figure in the upper left corner clutching a ladder (331r) highlights the movement between pages for the viewer.[90] Here, however, the ladder is not part of the arma christi, but becomes a tool for mediating the meanings of (entering?) the image to which it refers with a gesture. It encourages to step out from the edge of the picture and contemplate the previously depicted (328r) wound even more fully, even more concretely. The viewer thus identifies with the hybrid creature and should perhaps strengthen his interpretive and visual ideas based on the principle of the ladder (ascension). Christ as an ambiguous hybrid being represented by a vaginal wound – ambiguous as the (possible) body of the viewer, which can be represented by a human-animal marginal figure, suggest corporeal and gendered intermingling. Sight and touch, to which Christ invites with

[82] Ibidem, p. 12.

[83] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 143.

[84] WIRTH 1989 (see in note 31), p. 330.

[85] CAMILLE, M.: The Image of the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies. In: *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Ed.: KAY, S. – RUBIN, M. Manchester 1994, p. 77.

[86] KARRAS, R. M.: *Sexuality in Medieval Europe. Doing Unto Others*. Oxfordshire 2017, p. 70.

[87] AREFORD, D.: *The Metonymic Side wound of Christ*. Thirty-First International Congress on Medieval Studies, 1996.

[88] LERMACK 1999 (see in note 79), p. 26.

[89] Ibidem, p. 27.

[90] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 145.

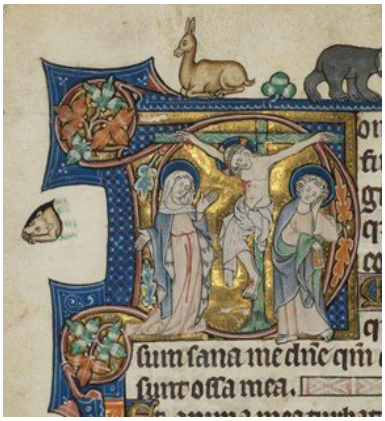

Fig. 7: A parody of the wound? Pabenham-Clifford Book of Hours MS 242, manuscript, c. 1315-1320, folio 55v, England. Source: https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/illuminated/manuscript/

his finger, (328r) are connected, the viewer becomes a patron in the painting, an affective participant in holy meditation.[91] Whether the author or other later owners of the manuscript also identified themselves in this way, we can only guess. However, this field of stimulating associations again leads to a re-evaluation of the primary meanings. Even if the effort to reach objectively valid conclusions leads us to align with the eye of the times, one cannot completely defend oneself against the ideas that are based on the knowledge and problems of our time.

The Pabenham-Clifford Hours – Folio 55v

The marginalia in medieval manuscripts are often the source of grotesque carnival scenes, which conduct a certain dialogue either with the textual component of the page or the dominant illumination, while as the opposite of the official world, the far side, they react to them or in some cases directly subvert them. Although there is a strict dividing line between them, which also determines their positions, they coexist side by side and together create an idea of the consciousness of a medieval person.[92] As an illuminated "commentary" on the pious scene, we can read the marginal scene in the Pabenham-Clifford hours[93] (in older literature the ownership of the manuscript was assigned to the couple Grey-Fitzpayn) dated around 1315-1320, illuminated by an unknown author or workshop for the English couple John de Pabenham and his second wife Joan Clifford (Fig. 7).

The depiction, filling in the historicizing initial of the letter D with which the penitential psalms begin, presents the crucified Christ with his mother Mary and the apostle John. The marginal scenes of this page contain images of patrons, heraldic shields and grotesques. On the left side of the initials, outside the scene and the ornamental frame of the text, i.e. in the area belonging to the marginalia, there is a small rodent trying to squeeze into its hole. The section of the cavity or nest with half of the animal's body from the right side is complemented by green brambles that may resemble an abstracted leafy surface (or perhaps pubic hair?). If the animal represents a squirrel, as Michael Camille claims[94], in connection with the close scene of the crucifixion and the obvious side wound of Christ, it also offers other, and thus marginal, meanings. For the contemporary reader, small furry animals were a reference to sexual organs.[95] The squirrel thus hides/enters the burrow-vagina in the position of the penis. With the visual note thus interpreted (unless we consider that it may also refer to the figure of the Virgin Mary – in which it should be noted that her long outstretched fingers pointing to the wound may also associate penetration), we could read the adjacent scene of the crucified Christ as an allegory (or vulgarization/parody) of pious entry into the wound for copulation,

[91] Ibidem, p. 146.

[92] CAMILLE 2019 (see in note 34), p. 11.

[93] The manuscript of The Pabenham-Clifford Hours is in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England. See: https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/illuminated/manuscript/discover/the-pabenham-clifford-hours.

[94] CAMILLE 2019 (see in note 34), p. 38.

[95] In the story "About Squirrel," which comes from a 13th-century French manuscript, there is a young girl who sees a naked male for the first time and asks him "what's in there." He jokingly refers to his genitals as a squirrel, which of course arouses the interest of a girl who wants to hold it in her hand. For shocking, depraved, but also subversive stories from the environment of medieval France, see: BLOCH, H.: *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*. Chicago 1986.

when the wound as a place of official sacral respect is likened to a vagina through which it is possible to penetrate and enter it. The sacred, high, spiritual is thus confronted with the profane, low and carnal. Understanding the meaning of the marginal representation of the wound thus required that the motif of the squirrel be understandable both to the author of the illumination and to its recipient, the owner of the manuscript.

In connection with marginal illuminations, Meyer Schapiro (under the influence of Freud's psychoanalysis) talks about the unconscious. In this context, the side scenes represent the liberation of the unconscious impulses of medieval man, impulses repressed by religion.[96] It was sex, marginalized in medieval experience, bound by contemporary (chrono)normatives[97], that became a frequent image on the edge of illuminated manuscripts.[98] The question is thus the understanding of the viewer's/reader's own body, identity or sexuality in the confrontation with the marginalia, the initial and the text. The initial with the wound – God's suffering and redemption – is reciprocally associated with penitential psalms encouraging examination of conscience, confession of sin and plea for forgiveness. Marginal representations are thus literally outside the field of spiritual values. They represent the worldly and therefore sinful. The parodic meaning of the reading, on the one hand, can thus disrupt the moral meaning, which highlights the spiritual fusion as opposed to the animal, human one. Confession of moral decline, coming out of the hole, even a kind of personal medieval "coming out", could accentuate a private confession, which uses the body as a place of humiliation through the body (wound) of Christ as a place of redemption, through the confrontation of the viewer with the depicted.

Seeing Today. A Holy Body – Subject to Change?

In connection with the involvement of all the senses when looking at the images of Christ's wounds, the medieval viewer was supposed to imagine himself as a witness of Jesus' torture, to internally feel his humanity and vulnerability, to identify with his suffering. However, this identification does not have to end here. Images of Christ's wound open possibilities for gendered interpretations of God's body, which can include not only masculine or feminine aspects, but also balance between them, without being either of them. Christ's body as gender-diverse could represent a personal response for its audience, recognizable regardless of gender, by such a depiction of its bodily morphology. By reading Christ's wound as a sign of genderqueerness,[99] Sexon suggests, the viewer's identification with Jesus' nonbinary body can result in self-identification as a nonbinary person.[100] As Bartlová writes: "The theme of nudity, desire and excitement/temptation reminds us that the committed gaze is gender-spe-

[96] CAMILLE 2019 (see in note 34), p. 37.

[97] In the context of (queer) time, we are interested in the notion of chrononormativity introduced by Elizabeth Freeman. The term chrononormativity represents the institutionalized binding of individual human bodies by the use of time towards their maximum productivity. Through the technique of chrononormativity, institutional forces appear as somatic facts. At the same time, temporal and structural norms privilege those who submit to them. The disruption of chrononormativity challenges linear understandings of temporality, and particularly the institutionalized organization of time, which often involves the staged progression of a heteronormatively modeled life. Chrononormativity is thus the expectation that we all follow the same timeline, that there is the same right thing at the right time for everyone. The author of the term argues that what is supposedly past has queer potential in its ability to disrupt the present tense. Queerness thus consists in mining the present for signs of the unquenched energy of past revolutions. See: FREEMAN, E.: *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham 2010, p. 3, Preface XVI.

[98] CAMILLE 2019 (see in note 34), p. 40.

[99] Genderqueer/nonbinary/gender expansiveness represents an umbrella category of gender identities, an "umbrella term" for identities that are neither exclusively male nor female but located outside the framework of cisnormativity and the gender binary. See: RAVEN. U.: *North American Lexicon of Transgender Terms*. 2006; Such individuality can be genderless/agender (neither male nor female), can "flow" between genders (gender-fluid), or understand the boundaries of their identity as overlapping. However, we are far from listing all the terms here, rather we outline the possibilities of the spectrum, which is constantly being enriched and reassessing its frameworks.

[100] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 134.

cific and also in the case of religious art can be part of sexuality, a culturally formed complex of actions based on sexual and gender identity."[101] Let's also not forget that the body of Christ it is also in a purely sacred framework a place of transformation and transformation. Transfiguration and transubstantiation are also positioning that frame Christ's body as transitory, open, yielding.[102] And just as we cannot impose (or determine) a specific gender on the body of Christ, we cannot prevent specific and (gender/gender/sexually motivated) individual interpretations of his images depending on the thinking and experience of the contemporary or contemporary viewer.

When looking at medieval paintings, however, we must necessarily assume that we do not achieve the same degree of visibility – we do not see them exactly as their creators and viewers saw them (whereby the proto-viewer is also the creator) and thus we do not have to reach their visuality.[103] However, it should be emphasized that, according to Davis, visuality is not the collective vision of a social group. By visuality, he understands the vision of every viewer who has reached the stage of visual culture[104] in the theoretical sense – into a network of similarities in the visual possibilities of the visible configuration. For each of us, the visible world is visually different. We can communicate and coordinate this difference – the visual aspects of things – with others – our vision and visuality for them and theirs for ours.[105] Only seeing without visuality is thus at the level of animal proprioception.[106]

At this point it is therefore appropriate to ask a few questions; Is the difference of the queer view relevant to the interpretation of the medieval work? What happens to the image when the contemporary vision and the contemporary viewer's vision are not identical? Can we *change* the meaning of visually *unchangeable*? Isn't the queering of art history in this sense an anachronistic destabilization? And in what way is it possible to stabilize queer-looking when working with medieval art? We will try to answer these questions. But first, let's start with the gender-theoretical possibilities of looking at Jesus' wound/vagina or the whole body that contains it:

- If the owner/viewer of such a display is a woman, does she kiss him, does she have erotic thoughts towards him (with which the kiss does not necessarily respond) and mental images – from a gender point of view, we could talk about homoeroticism (if she understands this wound as female genitalia), heteroerotics (if he understands "loving" the wounds as merging with the male ((and divine) body of Christ), the gender model that represents Jesus as a woman and mother – chaste but giving birth, depictions with an apotropaic function during childbirth (which has in connection with renunciation prayers, but also to protect the mother and child at birth with touches, kisses, etc.)...
- If the owner/viewer is a man, the homoerotic aspect is outlined again – on the one hand represented by the feminization of Christ – on the other hand by the idea of penetration, which should not be represented by female genitalia according to the correctness of homosexuality. In that case, the meaning of the wound as an

[101] BARTLOVÁ 2012 (see in note 3), p. 267.

[102] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 136.

[103] DAVIS, W.: *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Prehistory to Perspective*. Princeton 2017, p. 96.

[104] Visual culture, in Davis's terms, is the sociology of cultural productions and diverse technological practices within human artifacts and activities that are meant to be seen – are visible. Thus, visual culture, by its very name, focuses on the relationship between seeing and culture. To arrive at the visual, however, we must proceed from (primary) seeing through a historical process to arrive at visuality. The transmission and recursion of vision are inherently historical, transformed by the experience of the spectator and differentiated from one another between the various „agents of vision." The unpredictability of the succession from vision to visuality is an activity of social life and is related to human proprioception. The visible becomes cultural in visuality, and visuality usually cultivates what is visible. The relations between the visible and the visual are thus subject to reciprocity, recursions, but also resistances, failures, returns... All objects (works) and subjects (spectators) of visual culture are thus situated during this system of sequences and recursions. See: DAVIS 2011 (see in note 2), pp. 8–9.

[105] DAVIS 2011 (see in note 2), p. 319.

[106] Ibidem, p. 339.

opening would be shifted and perceived within homosexual sexual practices.

- For a *transgender* viewer, Christ with the female gender at his side could represent a moment of transformation – in a sense, the end of the "past (biological sex-determined) life" and the transition to a new life – to the desired inner gender.
- For *intersex* viewers, Jesus' body could serve as an example of a variation of sexual characteristics[107] that they can identify with.
- *Non-binary* and *genderfluid*[108] persons could identify with the mentioned images of Christ thanks to his gender ambiguity and thus we could continue with other (current) gender categories.
- Extreme but interesting (and in connection with the already articulated comparison of Christ to a door or an opening in architecture) would be to compare Christ's holy wound to a "glory hole," an opening in the wall through which (not only!) in gay (porn) culture fellatio is performed, or more broadly, an opening made in a wall or partition that allows people to perform sexual acts anonymously. The analogy with the glory hole may seem like blasphemy, on the other hand, the visions of the mystics (which for the contemporary can border on mental porn) involve wounding, penetration and anonymity within the space/cell in which they perform them.
- We could continue by looking at the body of Jesus as male, female or other, his role as son, father or (birth) mother, within the framework of medieval alchemical manuscripts in literature we also encounter Jesus as a hermaphrodite, within the framework of unrealized sexuality it is also possible to perceive him as eunuch and the list goes on…

We placed the above-mentioned options (mainly) in the gender categories known to us. However, we must not forget that these categories and nomenclature deviate from medieval designations at the time of their creation. A medieval person of a different orientation, gender or identity did not perceive himself in this way and did not know these expressions. It is also questionable to what extent he was able to name what he felt and evaluate his situation, his inner *truth*. Again, the question of pastoral care and repentance arises, and thus the question of sin, guilt and punishment. Being different in the Middle Ages probably meant feeling like a sinner inside. However, compared to the present, that has not changed that much. Any deviation from the norm – that is, sex for the purpose of reproduction in a specific location and on specific days of the year – fell under the category of sodomy[109], which in the Christian Middle Ages covered several variously defined sexual practices.

To see and perceive the medieval depiction of Christ's wound in a similar way is not very surprising to today's viewers, if we do not necessarily try to attribute general and historical validity to such a view. Our current knowledge and vision are permanently marked by the knowledge of our time (knowledge of bodily practices, specific gender categories, consumption of pornography, pre-sexualized pop

[107] We do not mean that intersex people possess both sexes. Such an idea is wrong, even though it is often associated with the concept of hermaphroditism. A hermaphroditic animal has both functional sexual systems – male and female. However, such a condition never occurs in an intersex person – either he has only one functional sexual system or he suffers from infertility.

[108] "When someone is genderfluid, it means that their genders can change, or that they so-called "fly" between genders. This change can take place among all genera or only among a specific handful. The main difference between bi-gender and gender-fluid identities is that with gender-fluid identities the change can be gradual, while with bi-gender identities people do not experience this gradual change." See: VARGICOVIE, V.: *The Non-Binary Handbook*. 2022. [online]. https://nebinarna-prirucka.netlify.app/ [viewed 2023-03-03].

[109] Sodomy – the sin of Sodom, the Sodomic way of sexual intercourse or, in general, the sin contra naturam, was a variable and broad category in the Middle Ages, which only occasionally denoted a clear variety of sexual activities. On closer examination, sodomy is a constellation of diverse but partially overlapping discourses that only fragmentarily meet modern notions of sodomy. Different contemporary writings articulate sodomy in different ways. With the medieval idea of "wasting" ejaculate, it could theoretically refer to any fornicating act that did not lead to human reproduction within the marital union. In that case, it is not purely about today's homosexuality. A broader understanding of medieval sodomy is represented by a seminal study by Robert Mills. See: MILLS, R.: *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*. Chicago 2015, p. 3.

culture, etc.) and to a certain extent we cannot see something that we are a cultural part of. However, this does not mean that there were no other (and for us, from today's perspective, queer) people in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages approached man and the body in other ways. Transferring to the present, we could perhaps note that queer could be anyone who participated in sodomy in the Middle Ages – that is, any (even heterosexual) individual who performed illicit sexual practices. It is therefore appropriate to ask how the medieval viewer understood different bodily representations. As Jean Wirth notes, the ambiguity of the content adds to the seductiveness of the images and develops them to the extreme. Art at the end of the Middle Ages also found itself in such a position, reaching borderline depictions of physical pain, violence and erotic tenderness.[110] In this framework, we need to emphasize the nature of the work of art, justify our vision and assign it a specific status in the sequence of viewing medieval visual culture.

According to Davis, depiction as such constitutes pictoriality, as a set of signs that allow us to see in them not only intended things but also those that were not the goal of replication. It is impossible to prevent the viewer from seeing something in (in the sense intended) something else (unintended by the author).[111] Vision means an unpredictable visual event.[112] And so, in the words of Davis, "*Just as depiction is overdetermined by the pictorialities from which it extracts its envisioning of things, so pictoriality is overdetermined by the resemblances from which it extracts its visibility.*" For this reason, we will always be able to see something else in a particular depiction, even if the work itself was created to see specific aspects in its image apparatus.[113] Objects created for visual use have both visibility and visuality for all who encounter them, including their creators. These concepts are not opposites. Visuality can be understood as a historical type of visibility, the way in which the visibility of specific things was organized, in terms of the forms of its similarity. In this context, Davis introduces the term *bivisibility* when he claims that "*any object of visual culture always has "bivisibility" — visibility both inside and outside the visuality, or more likely between the visualities, in which it was made to be used visually and that might be taken to be normative (regulative) in understanding the meaning (and/or construing the intention) of its visible features in context. But "understanding the meaning" (and/or "construing the intention") are partly thwarted by the general fact of bivisibility.*"[114] All objects (works) and subjects (viewers) of visual culture are thus located in the middle of this system of sequences and recursions.

Bivisibility in art history is work with the visibility of objects – individual visibilities among historians and other observers today – to the primary visuality of the object and its use in a specific time and visual space of the past. This comparative procedure does not stop between seeing in the present vs. visuality in the past but also continues between visibility and visuality of the past.[115] "*In the field of bivisibility all agents of vision conduct them continuously, weaving in and out of emergent networks of the aspects and analogies of things — networks that enable them visually to understand and to use the features of things that are visible to them in constant shifting fields in visual space, a space in which no image remains the same for long.*"[116] Davis' comparison of the term bivisibility to bisexuality is also stimulating and interesting in the context of our work. For

visuality, bivisibility is in a similar relationship as primordial bisexuality for heterosexuality and homosexuality. It represents a condition not only of the succession/graduation of sexuality (up to a certain moment normative for the originator and the subject) but also of its bending, resistance or definition against it in the horizons of comparison. That is, if we manage to "solve" primary bisexuality in specific sexuality, we can also solve its double visibility in specific visuality in a specific way.[117] What does this mean for us? This hypothesis has three

[110] WIRTH 1989 (see in note 31), p. 341.

[111] DAVIS 2011 (see in note 2), p. 152.

[112] Ibidem, p. 150.

[113] Ibidem, p. 155.

[114] DAVIS 2017 (see in note 102), p. 99.

[115] Ibidem, p. 100.

[116] Ibidem, p. 100.

[117] Ibidem, p. 101.

implications. The first is the possibility of moving from approaches of immutability to natural human vision and approaches of historicity – bridging polarization. The second suggests that bivisibility, as an intrinsically proper condition of the visible, is actualized through cultural interactions. The bearer of vision (viewer) passes through bivisibility when moving between visualities – a way of visual use of the object inside and outside the series of disjoint networks of analogies. A third follows from these consequences, namely that bivisibility is both intercultural and transcultural. The sequence of visuality, as well as the historical structure of any particular sequence, thus takes place in the field of bivisibility. It is a double helix in which intertwined rows of visual sequences intermingle and recombine.[118]

With this complex theoretical apparatus, we want to point out the multiplicity (and fluidity) of viewing/reading the work, the conscious acknowledgment of the "contemporary eye" and the potentiality of the meaning variability of images, because by expanding the possibilities of seeing, as Davis says, no image stays the same for long. So, if we return to the initial claim that we see medieval paintings differently from his contemporaries, accept vision as an individual and unpredictable event that cannot be prevented, and recognize the property of bivisibility in the history of art, we will thereby also support the possibility of a queer reading of individual works of art. In a simplified way, we could note that with contemporary genderqueer-situated research, we can indeed read (and look at) the works of the Middle Ages in terms of gender, and in a sensitive way subvert the illusion of a strict chrononormative "period without another," but only to the extent that for the given period it does not turn the symptomatic into a violently ahistorical-solipsistic longing for an idealized warm Middle Ages. However, this does not mean that queer people do not have history, or that history does not know queer people.

Although we admit that there is a significant difference between the distinction of today's gender/sex/sexualities/sexual practices and medieval categories, people in the Middle Ages a) had sex, were carnal, felt desire; b) they knew (and through various prohibitions, courts, penance and punishment declared) the existence of "other" outside the set norms; c) they had their own idea of gender, a system of categories and sexual practices (from the ideal to deviations); d) allowed a certain degree of gender transformation, equality and, for example, cross-dressing within the framework of legendary stories.

As Sexon writes, Christ and the saints, depicted as persons of indeterminate gender, gender outside the (viewed by us) binary framework, provide us with an image that transcending gender categories can be understood as part of God's will[119], or for us as part of a specific and for the medieval world determining iconographic program. Thus, medieval works do not necessarily acquire new queer meanings, because within their own rules and cultural practices they also reflect the other, sometimes only suspicious, other times directly identified as threatening. The current treatment of these works as imaginary fragments of queer history can, on the one hand, represent a certain degree of destabilization of common ideas, but on the other hand, this very destabilization is a condition for the expansion of interpretations, which thus offer a more comprehensive overview of the history, herstories and queer history (not only) of art.

[118] Ibidem, p. 102.

[119] SEXON 2021 (see in note 70), p. 137.

Rana na Ježišovom boku
Rodové a teologické perspektívy Božieho tela v stredoveku

Résumé

Prezentovaná štúdia skúma stredoveké zobrazenia Kristovho tela a analyzuje ich cez prizmu teórie vizuálnej kultúry a rodových štúdií. Rozoberá, ako stredoveké zobrazenia Krista, najmä so zameraním na ranu v jeho boku, slúžili ako prostriedok na vyjadrenie komplexných náboženských a rodových tém. Kristovo telo bolo vnímané ako projekcia rôznych sociálnych túžob a ideálov, čo umožňovalo a umožňuje rôznym skupinám, vrátane tých, ktoré sa nachádzajú mimo normou vymedzených rámcov, nadviazať s ním individuálny kontakt. Práca tak skúma Kristovu ranu nielen z pozície prežívania a napodobňovania utrpenia, ale najmä z hľadiska špecificky rodových interpretácií, ako sú ženské vlastnosti Kristovho tela, pripomínajúce telo starostlivej matky, najmä prostredníctvom asociácií s dojčením a pôrodom. Diskusia sa rozširuje o to, ako stredoveké alegorické čítanie Písma a umenia umožňovalo viacvrstvové chápanie týchto zobrazení, kde obrazy mohli vyjadrovať viacero významov vrátane rodových. V texte sa zdôrazňuje úloha duchovných postáv, ako sú mnísi a mníšky, pri formovaní tohto vnímania, pričom sa zdôrazňuje vrstevnatá povaha chápania a zobrazovania Krista, v ktorom sa miešajú mužské a ženské atribúty. Skúma tiež telesnosť stredovekých náboženských praktík, v ktorých sa veriaci zaoberali náboženskými obrazmi a textami vo svojich predstavách – vnútorných obrazoch, ale aj hmatovým spôsobom, ktorý prehlboval ich duchovné spojenie. Na vybraných príkladoch stredovekých rukopisov poukazujeme na možnosti vzťahu k božskému telu a jeho zobrazeniam, ako aj na spôsoby jeho používania. Apotropajicko-magické narábanie s obrazom rany, luxusné rukopisné objednávky či parodické marginálie tak predstavujú možnosti manipulácie a nazerania na svätú ranu v stredoveku. Text napokon ukazuje, že tieto stredoveké zobrazenia Krista, najmä rany v jeho boku, prekračovali jednoduchú rodovú binaritu, miešali božské s ľudským, mužské so ženským a duchovné s fyzickým.

Rodový pohľad na Kristovu ranu sa prehodnocuje aj z hľadiska dnešného diváctva a jeho videnia. Teórie Whitney Davisa zaoberajúce sa videním, jeho nepredvídateľnosťou a vrstvením sú ústredným bodom tejto časti. Nielen historici umenia, ale aj verejnosť ako agenti videnia pristupujú k obrazu ako k určitému času, a tak prenikajú do procesu vizuality z opačného konca ako stredoveký divák. Obraz tak predstavuje viac, než zobrazuje, vrstvia sa v ňom rôzne spôsoby videnia, konfrontujú sa viaceré perspektívy a možnosti interpretácie, a to nielen z pohľadu marginalizovaných skupín. Táto koncepcia naznačuje, že stredoveké diela možno čítať v súlade so súčasnými queer perspektívami a zároveň zachovať ich historický kontext. V závere textu sa zdôrazňuje, že aj keď sa stredoveké chápanie rodu a sexuality líši od dnešných kategórií, moderné queer interpretácie môžu obohatiť naše chápanie stredovekého umenia a jeho rôznorodých významov. Tieto interpretácie umožňujú rozšírené čítanie diel a podporujú komplexnejšie chápanie histórie, queer identity a histórie možných queer perspektív a identít.

Mgr. Dominik Štrbo
Centrum vied o umení SAV, v.v.i.
Dúbravská cesta 9, 841 04 Bratislava

Katedra dejín a teórie umenia
Filozofická fakulta TU v Trnave
Hornopotočná 23, 918 43 Trnava
e-mail: dominik.strbo@gmail.com