THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE
In the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance
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and Renaissance

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edited by
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The present volume results from the conference L'immagine miracolosa nella cultura tardomedievale e rinascimentale, which was held at the Danish Academy in Rome, 31 May - 2 June 2002. The aim of the conference was to shed light on a body of visual material, often neglected by art history, and thus to call attention to a new field of study in the visual arts of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

In recent years the miraculous image has been recognized as an important phenomenon of medieval visual culture, but its place and significance in the visual culture of the early modern period has been widely overlooked by art historians. Nonetheless, as the papers presented in this volume demonstrate, not only did the cult and quantity of miraculous images intensify during the post-medieval period, but new, alternative types of miracle-working images also developed. Such images attracted the attention of individuals from all ranks of society, and through their multiplication and diffusion (by means of copies), helped to shape post-medieval sacred topography, since they were often the objects of pilgrimage and the basis for the building of sanctuaries. Thus miraculous images became desirable objects of prestige and authority for civic communities and other corporate bodies.

By presenting papers with a variety of analytic approaches, we hope that the contributions in the present volume will stimulate further conceptual thinking regarding topics such as image and miracle, original versus copy, image and art in the early modern period, traditional art historical periodization, images and their stories, Italy and the Holy Land and visual response.

The volume comprises the revised versions of all papers given at the conference. In addition, we are grateful to both André Vauchez and Susan Verdi Webster who, without having participated in the conference, generously agreed to contribute to the volume respectively with an introduction, and a paper on the Spanish seventeenth-century practice of adorning statues of the Virgin.

The conference was organized by the editors of the present volume as a collaborative project between the Bibliotheca Hertziana (Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte) and the Danish Academy in Rome. It gives us great pleasure that this collaboration was extended to include the publication of the papers. We wish to express our gratitude to Elisabeth Kieven and Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, directors of the Bibliotheca Hertziana, and to Gunver Skytte, then director of the Danish Academy, for their continuous support during the various phases of this initiative. We also wish to thank Julian Kliemann for his help during the publication process. Finally, we should like to thank the Bibliotheca Hertziana and the Novo Nordisk Foundation for having generously shared the costs of both the conference and the present publication.

Rome and Florence, July 2004

Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf
INTRODUCTION

by André Vauchez

Depuis une trentaine d’années – en particulier depuis l’article pionnier de Richard Trexler sur la Madonne de l’Impruneta et le livre de David Freedberg sur *The Power of Images* – on a beaucoup écrit au sujet du pouvoir miraculeux reconnu à certaines images en Occident à l’époque médiévale et au début des temps modernes, si bien que l’on pourrait légitimement se demander s’il y a encore quelque chose de nouveau à dire sur ce thème. 1 Disons d’emblée que la réponse est positive et que, lors de la rencontre organisée à Rome par Erik Thun et Gerhard Wolf dont le présent volume constitue les actes, on ne s’est pas contenté de répéter ou de développer ce qui avait déjà dit par d’autres, mais on a cherché avec succès à approfondir le contenu de la notion d’image miraculeuse et les perspectives qu’elle ouvre dans le domaine de l’histoire et de l’histoire de l’art. Parmi les aspects les plus intéressants de ce nouveau dossier, figure une réflexion sur l’expression “image miraculeuse” dont on s’accorde aujourd’hui à reconnaitre le caractère ambigu et même trompeur. Comme l’a souligné Trexler, les historiens actuels ne doivent pas se laisser influencer par la conception médiévale selon laquelle “popular devotion and divine response were not only consecutive realities. Both were considered effects of the power of images.” 2 La dénomination d’image miraculeuse peut en effet donner l’impression que l’image possède un pouvoir surnaturel, une *virtus* qui émanerait d’elle-même, alors que l’attribution de cette qualité est le fait d’un groupe plus ou moins large qui, pour un temps parfois limité, reconnaît un caractère sacré à la représentation d’un personnage religieux ou à un objet. Le caractère miraculeux de telles images ne procède donc ni de leur nature ni d’un contact physique avec leur prototype, mais de la réponse qu’à un moment donné elles ont suscitée auprès d’un public et dans le comportement dévotional de ce dernier à son égard. En ce sens, chaque image miraculeuse est le produit d’une histoire particulière et d’un contexte précis et évolutif; et, de fait, les divers auteurs de ce volume ont presque tous mis en évidence le lien existant entre l’apparition ici ou là d’images miraculeuses et des situations de crise, de conflit ou d’affirmation d’un groupe religieux, social ou politique qui, en s’efforçant de faire reconnaître par la collectivité le caractère surnaturel d’une image qui jusque là ne s’était pas signalée par des caractères particuliers, visait à obtenir une reconnaissance de ses prérogatives ou de son influence, en particulier dans le cadre de l’Église et de la cité.


2 Trexler, “Florentine Religious Experience,” 17.
Une autre question fondamentale est également étudiée ici avec beaucoup de sérieux et de précision: comment se fait-il que certaines images deviennent miraculeuses à un moment donné? Il est bien difficile de définir des règles dans ce domaine sans trouver immédiatement de nombreuses exceptions. N’importe quelle image, religieuse ou non, peut en effet être investie d’un pouvoir inhérent qui, à un certain moment, se révèle au grand jour à l’occasion d’une vision, d’une animation ou de miracles. On a toutefois remarqué une certaine préférence du public pour les images “exotiques,” par exemple, dans l’Italie des derniers siècles du Moyen Âge où foisonnaient les Madones “alla greca”, souvent d’origine orientale, dont on attribuait la réalisation à saint Luc. Mais si l’antiquité est une source de prestige, ce n’est pas le seul critère qui entre en jeu. Comme le montrent bien Gerhard Wolf et plusieurs autres auteurs, il s’agit en général d’œuvres d’art d’un niveau très modeste, situées parfois à la périphérie des villes ou dans des zones marginales de la cité, et qui, soit par leur aspect bizarre ou mystérieux, soit à la suite de l’apparition de signes physiques (images qui pleurent ou qui saignent) ou en raison de l’origine divine qu’on leur prête (images “achéropites”), frappent et retiennent l’attention d’un individu et d’un groupe. La sacralité de l’image ne tient pas à ce qu’elle représente, mais à son origine considérée comme miraculeuse (par exemple les statues de la Vierge trouvées dans un arbre ou qu’un paysan avait exhumées du sol avec sa charrue, si fréquentes dans les légendes de fondation des sanctuaires) ou surnaturelle, telles l’image romaine de la “Véronique” ou le Saint-Suaire de Turin. En tout cas, c’est cette origine divine prémunie qui rend compte de la force spirituelle de l’image et, en particulier, de ses pouvoirs thaumaturgiques. On peut évidemment tenter d’expliquer ces phénomènes en les rapprochant des processus magiques, comme l’a fait Freedberg dans son livre, mais cette grille de lecture est sans doute trop systématique ou réductrice. En fait, l’image miraculeuse n’est pas seulement active, dans la mesure où elle effectue des miracles. Elle est surtout interactive par rapport à un spectateur ou à un public de dévots pour lesquels il est normal qu’elle intervienne en leur faveur, dès lors qu’ils la voient et la vénèrent, et qui la considèrent comme un “medium” présumé situé entre le monde d’ici-bas et l’au-delà. Le critère essentiel de la popularité des images miraculeuses réside en effet dans leur efficacité et le succès de certaines d’entre elles est lié, du point de vue du fidèle ou du pèlerin, au fait que le personnage qu’elles représentent se montre réceptif à la prière de ceux qui l’implorent et particulièrement disposé à l’exaucer. D’où le caractère souvent temporaire de ces “dévotions” envers des images miraculeuses, dont le succès est parfois assimilable à un effet de mode. Ainsi, comme l’ont bien montré Megan Holmes et Giulia Barone à propos respectivement de la Vierge de l’Annunziata et des diverses Madones romaines, c’est toujours de Marie qu’il s’agit et dont les images sont réputées miraculeuses; mais ce qui comptait pour l’”usager” était moins la personne de la Vierge que le lieu où elle avait choisi de révéler son pouvoir. À Florence, la première à l’avoir fait semble avoir été la Madone d’Orsannichele,
dont le caractère miraculeux se manifesta à partir de 1292 mais qui fut supplanérée, à partir des premières décennies du XIVe siècle, par celle de l’Impruneta, qui dut elle-même céder la place d’honneur à la Madonne de l’Annunziata après les crises liées à la peste et en raison de faveur particulière que les Médicis manifestèrent à l’égard des Servites de Marie dans l’église desquels elle se trouvait. Cela ne signifie certes pas que les “dévotions” primitives disparaissaient au fur et à mesure que les nouvelles s’affirmaient; mais, après avoir attiré à elle toute la ville, elles limitaient souvent leur influence à un groupe social — en particulier la confrérie qui s’était développée autour de son culte et l’entretenait — ou à un quartier.

Au delà du problème de la genèse du caractère miraculeux de telle ou telle image, plusieurs contributions contenues dans le présent volume soulignent l’importance de sa gestion qui est à l’origine de nombreuses œuvres d’art. Souvent découverte par un individu isolé — berger, enfant ou paysan — l’image miraculeuse fait en effet l’objet d’un processus de socialisation qui aboutit parfois à la construction d’une chapelle ou d’une église, à la fois signe du succès de la dévotion et moyen d’accroître encore cette dernière. De plus, comme le souligne justement Trexler, l’image n’est pas immuable et s’enrichit d’éléments décoratifs qui n’ont rien d’accessoire, comme le cadre — en bois doré ou en argent — ou les rayons qui entourent et mettent en relief telle ou telle peinture ou fragment de fresque, et surtout l’habillement dont on revêt les statues et qui dissimule leur corps — le plus souvent constitué d’une âme de bois ou de plâtre, matières éminemment vulgaires —, ne laissant apparaître que le visage et les extrémités des membres façonnées par des artistes. Des études consacrées ici même à l’Espagne — mais on pourrait en dire autant pour l’ensemble des pays méditerranéens et l’Amérique latine — illustrent bien ce processus de sacralisation accentué souvent par un jeu de rideaux qui ne s’entrouvraient qu’à l’occasion de certaines fêtes, contribuant par là à faire désirer la vue de l’image. Dans d’autres cas, des “recharges de sacralité” sont produites par l’adjonction de couronnes en métal précieux, effectuées par le clergé dans le cadre de cérémonies solennelles qui assurent la relance périodique d’une dévotion qui, sans cela, risquerait de s’assoupir ou de se porter sur d’autres objets.

S’agissant d’un colloque où les historiens de l’art étaient largement majoritairement, il est normal et significatif qu’une des questions les plus fréquemment évoquées ait été celle de la périodisation de l’âge d’or des images miraculeuses. Dans ce domaine, des avancées intéressantes ont été réalisées qui ont conduit à remettre en cause les thèses de Aby Warburg et Hans Belting selon lesquels celles-ci constituaient un phénomène typiquement médiéval qui, à l’époque de la Renaissance, aurait disparu au sein de la haute culture et n’aurait survécu que dans les milieux populaires comme une croyance marginale. À l’“âge de l’art” et de la perspective, l’artiste serait devenu l’auteur du “miracle” qui est désormais d’ordre esthétique et non plus religieux. Plusieurs contributions contestent ce schéma d’évolution et le titre même du présent volume, qui inclut dans un même ensemble les derniers siècles du
Moyen Age et l’époque de la Renaissance, illustre ce refus de briser l’unité de la période définie comme “Early Modern” par les historiens anglo-saxons. Les enquêtes effectuées sur le terrain montrent bien en effet qu’en Italie centrale, beaucoup d’images miraculeuses n’ont été reconnues comme telles qu’à la fin du XVᵉ ou au XVIᵉ siècle, alors qu’elles avaient été peintes ou sculptées au XIVᵉ. D’autre part, il apparaît bien que, même si la Réforme et l'iconoclasme protestant ont porté un coup d’arrêt brutal au phénomène dans l’Europe du Nord-Ouest, les images miraculeuses ont continué à jouer un rôle central dans le catholicisme romain – en particulier en Amérique du Sud – jusqu’au XVIIᵉ siècle. En ce qui concerne les origines, la chronologie est plus floue mais il faut sans doute remonter jusqu’au XIIIᵉ siècle. C’est alors en effet, comme je l’ai montré dans mes propres travaux, que l’image commence à prendre le relais des reliques des saints, dans un univers mental où le voir occupe une place croissante à côté et bientôt aux dépens du toucher, et dans un climat culturel où les théologiens mettent l’accent sur la puissance de la vis imaginativa, capable de transformer de simples images externes en images mentales et d’identifier la représentation à son modèle. Poussée à la limite, cette conception impliquait la reconnaissance d’une présence active (capacité de se mouvoir et s’émouvoir) et passive (sensibilité, capacité de pâtrir et d’être offensée) dans la représentation. L’image sainte, en vertu de son pouvoir mimétique, apparaît donc comme potentiellement dynamique et le miracle, lorsqu’il se produisait, était considéré comme une simple actualisation de la sacralité qui existait en elle à l’état latent.

Mais l’apport principal et le plus novateur des communications ici réunies réside sans doute dans le lien que nombre d’entre elles établissent entre les images miraculeuses et les sanctuaires dans lesquels elles se trouvaient déjà ou qui furent construits spécialement pour les abriter, après la manifestation de leur caractère surnaturel. Cette “révélation” avait pour effet de sacrifier un lieu ou un ensemble de lieux, comme le montre bien Michele Bacci à propos des sanctuaires que les marins italiens, au XVᵉ siècle, faisaient figurer sur leurs portulans, qui dessinent une sorte d’itinéraire sacré du recours et du secours en cas de tempête tout au long des côtes de la Méditerranée. Et ce n’est certes pas un hasard si la plupart des nouveaux sanctuaires apparus entre le XIVᵉ et le XVIᵉ siècle furent dédiés à la Vierge Marie, dans la mesure où son image constituait un substitut de ces reliques dont les villes et les châteaux regorgeaient mais dont les campagnes étaient notoirement dépourvues. En outre, la dévotion à une image mariale pouvait se manifester dans les endroits les plus divers et les plus reculés, sans qu’il soit nécessaire de recourir à la médiation des clercs puisque une apparition à un simple laïc suffisait à donner naissance à un culte que l’Église finissait généralement par approuver s’il s’enracinait dans la durée et dans un édifice cultuel. Plusieurs

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études dans ce volume s’intéressent à la typologie de ces sanctuaires. Paul Davies, par exemple, signale qu’en Italie centrale ceux-ci étaient souvent plus sombres et moins éclairés au niveau architectural (nombre et taille des fenêtres, vitraux) que la plupart des églises qui furent construites à la même époque, et il voit là un moyen utilisé de façon consciente et volontaire “to enhance the radiance of the honorific lights that burned before the miracle-working image.” La réduction de la lumière naturelle aurait favorisé, dans ces sanctuaires, une profusion de lumière artificielle (lampes à huile, cierges, chandelles etc.) autour de l’image miraculeuse, ce qui aurait permis aux visiteurs et aux pèlerins de mieux voir les lumières représentant leurs prières et leurs requêtes, tout en leur donnant l’assurance que leur offrande était contemplée par la Vierge ou par le Christ miraculeux qu’on vénérerait en ce lieu. Dans certains cas, on peut même saisir une relation particulière entre le culte des images miraculeuses et certaines formes architecturales, comme les églises à plan centré qui furent construites en Ombrie et en Toscane, à la fin du XVᵉ et au XVIᵉ siècle, à la périphérie de certaines agglomérations. Comme le montre bien Erik Thune à partir de l’exemple de Santa Maria della Consolazione à Todi, ces édifices surmontés d’une coupole se montraient en effet particulièrement aptes à accueillir des visiteurs et des pèlerins à la recherche d’un rapport direct avec le surnaturel. Sanctifiées par la présence d’une image miraculeuse, ces églises généralement situées en dehors des murs, au contact de la cité et de son contado, étaient d’autant plus indépendantes par rapport au cadre paroissial urbain qu’elles avaient été érigées à la suite d’un vœu de la communauté d’habitants et qu’elles étaient placées sous le patronage de la commune ou du seigneur local. Plus que d’un édifice cultuel, il s’agit d’une châsse ou d’un mémorial abritant la trace d’un prodige surnaturel, dans lequel s’exprimait un nouveau rapport au sacré centré sur l’image miraculeuse plutôt que sur la liturgie, ce qui renvoie sans doute à la crise que traversait l’Église établie à la veille de la Réforme.

Il ne saurait être question ici d’analyser toute la richesse de ce volume dont la présente introduction vise seulement à donner un avant-goût. En plus des questions évoquées ci-dessus, on pourra également y trouver d’intéressants développements sur le rôle des copies d’images miraculeuses ou des gravures les représentant qui, en démultipliant les foyers de dévotion, ont contribué à conférer à certaines d’entre elles une notoriété sans précédent, comme on le constate avec la diffusion du modèle de la “Santa Casa” et du culte rendu à Notre-Dame de Lorette dans l’Occident des XVᵉ et XVIᵉ siècles. Reste à savoir quand et comment se termina l’histoire des images miraculeuses. Leur fin ne semble pas liée, nous l’avons vu, à l’avènement de la modernité ou au succédé de l’imprimerie, pas plus qu’au discrédit dans lequel elles seraient tombées aux yeux des élites de la culture ou du goût. En fait, c’est plutôt du côté de l’Église, ou tout au moins de sa hiérarchie, qu’il faut chercher l’ex-

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4 Paul Davies, infra, p. 68.
lication d'un recul progressif mais inexorable. Pour répondre — sans l'avouer ouvertement — aux critiques des Protestants contre le culte des images dont ils devaient bien reconnaître qu'elles contenaient une part de vérité, les Pères du concile de Trente et, plus tard, les papes du siècle des Lumières condamnèrent certains types d'images saintes jusque là en honneur (Vierges ouvrantes, Trinités tricéphales, Christ du dimanche) et établirent sur le culte de celles qui étaient reconnues comme légitimes un contrôle beaucoup plus sévère qu'auparavant; désormais ne seront considérées comme miraculeuses que les images que l'autorité ecclésiastique aura reconnues comme telles au terme d'une enquête approfondie et qui se trouveront à l'intérieur d'églises conventuelles ou paroissiales, sous la tutelle du clergé, et non dans des chapelles ou des sanctuaires mineurs dispersés dans la campagne. Ainsi l'image religieuse se trouva réduite à une fonction de défense et d'illustration de la doctrine qui allait rester prépondérante, au sein du catholicisme romain, jusqu'à l'époque contemporaine.
A miraculous image in the West is an inorganic representation of a human being that allegedly produces an unnatural or “miraculous” effect on something external to itself, perhaps without any change to itself. Or it may be a representation that supposedly itself changes momentarily, perhaps without a change to anything external to itself. That is, the inorganic presumably becomes organic. As regards either phenomenon, it needs be said that the term “miraculous image” to the contrary, no object, not even a worshiped vacuum bearing such a representation, has ever been miraculous in either direction. As the massive literature on such images in many cultures makes clear, quite apart from fraud, the allegedly miraculous character of objects emerges only in certain times and spaces but not in others, when these images return just as quickly to a profane or non-active state. 1 Here today, gone tomorrow – hardly the mark of a per se “miraculous image,” and intelligent observers of all ages have shared that insight. 2 Thus the miraculous resides only in the temporally and spatially limited imaginations and manipulations of certain persons, societies and cultures.

The form that the miraculous object takes must not, to be sure, be an image with eyes to see, the sense characteristic associated with Western miraculous images. Mountains, old stickpins, rabbit’s feet and of course unleavened bread have served as miracle workers as well, though such non-ocular objects are often said to evolve rapidly into human-like images so that their demonstrated miraculous power might be retained. 3 A comparable devolutionary conversion may also be observed in the mass of images, whether two- or three dimensional. While so-called miraculous images are usually imagined to have a human-like volume that, like human bodies, conceals some material and spiritual substance, they can as we shall see obviously lose those innards and,
without any mass, still seem to accomplish their wondrous feats. Humans in fact assign miraculous values to objects whether they are images or not, are of two or three dimensions, and that do or do not have mass. To be truthful, what we call miraculous images are usually those that are thought to have begun their miraculous mini-careers by successfully moving us to tears during devotion, while we sought to communicate with them in some particularly identifiable and thus remembered time and space. The theologians have a name for that (only imagined) communication between the organic and the inorganic: compassion. 4 Wonders follow.

Our sources tell us that this experience of organic and inorganic eyes provoking each other usually follows a predictable, triadic, trajectory in traditional Europe, if we are to judge by some of our sources. In one ideal type, the first miracle performed by an image occurred in a profane, perhaps exotic, area, 5 away from the public but in the presence of a nearby devotee who was moved to tears. 6 At this point that individual’s tale was not widely credited. Second, sometimes some powerful lay person got hold of the image and removed it to his or her domestic residence, so that the image might henceforth perform miracles for that lady or lord and their domestic intimates or friends. 7 Still, the image’s charismatic claim, though enhanced by now being owned by a “decent” party, might yet be doubted, for it was so obviously in that party’s political interest to have such an object. Third and most decisive, if the image’s reputation as miraculous continued to grow, a local church or cathedral would often step in and claim that the miraculosity of the image could only be proven if miracles happened before the total community, and that in any case any image with sacred qualities deserved the protection of the priest(s) of the church, that is, of that communal place where solemnity and devotion were supposedly the rule rather than the exception. The holy, temporary though it might be, belonged in church. Indeed, a perceived increase of all worshipers’ solemnity in the particular space now assigned to that image might further prove its charismatic character. 8 As a result, the alleged greater solemnity of worshipers in the lord’s home or now in a church commonly became the context of a battle for possession. Here are the stakes: either the chapel the lord or lady had built for the image, or the local parish


5 Hans Belting shows that in early modern times, “The [exotic] East” was often said to be the origin of a miraculous image; Hans Belting, Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst (Munich, 1990), 345.

6 The best exposition of the early modern process as described in the following lines is in William A. Christian, Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain (Princeton, 1981) and the same author’s Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain (Princeton, 1981).

7 I have found this dynamic at work both in traditional Europe cultures and in the sixteenth-century Americas.

8 See for instance Belting, Bild und Kult, 16, for “authentic” images that would turn on churches if they were not offered hospitality there.
or Mendicant church of the town, would ultimately become or remain the
dominant charismatic center of the community, that is, "God's house."

Whether physical or emotional, a greater solemnity and movement of wor-
shipers may be in fact that which was rather said to be miraculous, for what
is more wondrous than a community rigidly submissive in a particular space
before a set of seemingly inert eyes set in an inorganic body? And in fact, it
is this very real social stabilization that is often seen as the miraculous effect
of any given image. Here is the long and short of it: Despite the lay patron's
often enduring claim to and conventional association with an image, often
devotees only reach a consensus and definitively affirm that an image is or
was miraculous once it is in a church.

To express the thought otherwise, let us say that only images in churches
make it into the history books, as we may judge from the stories of the other
images described in the present volume. There is, to be sure, no reason to
believe that once ensconced in a church, such images automatically contin-
ued to make miracles. It may be enough that they had made them and thus
become a cultural, if no longer a devotional, presence. My point is only that
in church and popular parlance the "miraculous image" was by definition
one in a church, though perhaps accompanied by a legend of its original ac-
tivation outside. 9 We cannot study "miraculous images" while remaining in-
different to this all but accidental ecclesiastical context. Historians need to
be aware of these settings to understand images' political sociology.

Thus our ancestors usually went to churches - at certain planned times,
when Mary or some other numen was awake (a normal understanding) to
see them. They did so to eye certain images said to bring miraculous con-
version. 10 Then they acted to maintain that connection over time. Still today
humans commonly cultivate the sacrality of certain spaces and times in which
they wish to be moved.

The approach to the so-called miraculous image adumbrated in these first
pages is, I suggest, a rewarding way to study such fleeting objects of adora-
tion, and contextualizes the arguments that I will present in what follows.
First, let me say that for all the recent attention a few historians of art have
sought to give to the cult that has accompanied their pictures, they have in
fact added only modestly to what we know about the behavior of devotees
around their images. This is largely due to their concentration on individual
images and thus narrow source material, and to an absence of wide reading

9 To be sure, many of these origin legends were or are manufactured by churchmen after an im-
age was in a church. Put otherwise, to have any credibility, the story of an original outside mir-
acle, must be documented before the time it entered its ultimate church residence.
10 Private persons, especially well-to-do ones, did of course retain images at home that they pri-
vately considered miraculous; Belting, Bild und Kult, 438, 458-459. The anthropology of the tra-
ditional southern European image is essayed in Richard C. Trexler, "Ritual Behavior in Rena-
in non-ecclesiastical sources and in the anthropology of devotion. They concentrate on self-interested ecclesiastical sources and on the individual objects such sources describe. Yet once we integrate into our research the absence of miracles or miraculous images in the real world past and present, we are left only with society and culture, rather than inorganic images, as the active forces in the factual interchange between humans that is facilitated by such dead images. To know how such images are socially constructed so as to facilitate such interchange, we must concentrate first and last on the society that produces such objects as a class.  

Second, I wish to stress how mistaken we are when we describe these images as if they were in a museum, stripped to the bone and divested of all the ornaments of clothing and honors with which they were earlier dressed. In fact, they had clearly owed their so-called miraculosity to these features, heaped on them by rustic legends, power-seeking rulers and other devotees.  

Third and last, I wish to lay out some of the procedures in the early modern process of ornamentation that occurred from the inside out, a process through which images could be taught to move (us). At that point, as we shall see, images approached a state of immateriality, in which state moderns might learn that there are and were no miracles.

Following the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians, traditional Europeans, just like their modern counterparts, acted as if they assumed that beneath the surface of any object there was usually spirit and matter just as in us. In the case of images, that matter, conceived as some type of weighty spirit or heart, might reach the outside devotees through the images’ eyes. That was particularly the case with religious representations, which might work their “miraculous” effect upon the supplicant or upon the environment only once an emotive connection had been established. It was generally thought that any image, whether flat or sculpted, might project a certain transformative power.  

A good power might be quite specific and limited in nature, such as the European images prized for “giving peace” to devotees, while a bad power, such as those “ugly” images Europeans were finding in the Americas at this point, might be just as pointed, bringing down the devil’s wrath upon the

11 David Freedberg is not wrong in arguing that power can be thought to inhere in any image, religious or not; David Freedberg, The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response (Chicago and London, 1989). Cultural and social history must simply be aware of their distinctiveness, and above all, the latter must avoid platitudes about progress. Thus Webster’s otherwise important Art and Ritual dismisses her Spanish devotees’ belief that “images could be inhabited by the divine” as “superstitions and idolatrous”; ibid., 186. Such a belief was and is much more pragmatic and reasonable than that in invisible supernaturals. Michele Bacci, “Pro remedio animae”: Immagini sacre e pratiche devotionali in Italia centrale (secoli XIII e XIV) (Pisa, 2000), disputes the relevance of power for the understanding of image worship.

12 A view shared by Freedberg, Power of Images, 117-120.

13 I know of no attempt to quantify the matter, however. I treat pictures and statues indifferently in this paper, though I hope others by quantification will be able to show I have been wrong in doing so.
conquerors. By the end of the fifteenth century as well, European artists like Alberti and Leonardo boldly proclaimed that they were the ones who imbued objects with such powers, powers that then reached devotees as affects. There were then, as I have written elsewhere, “certain forms [and contents] that, if incorporated into images by mortal men, were thought to have particularly efficacious [or negative] impacts upon the attitudes of devotees.” I argued further that there existed in this age, in fact, “an aesthetic based on knowledge of psychological attitudes toward different types of representations.” Indeed, Cristoforo Landino had made the same point and better, saying that artists were the manufacturers of many such attitudes or sentiments. Avant-garde Italian artists like Alberti wanted to believe, indeed, that their work could infuse that psychological characteristic into or onto objects without ornamentation. Gold, a type of clothing, slowly faded from the Tuscan palette.

Let us be clear, however, that other artists of the time rejected the Albertian and Leonardesque notion that painters should aim to provoke “pious” viewer reactions, that is, tears and conversion. Thus in a well-known statement attributed to Michelangelo by Francesco de Holanda, the master allegedly averred that “Flemish painting is more pleasing to all the pious than Italian painting.” Italian painting. Francesco has Buonarroti continue, “never evokes tears, while the former [through ornament, he makes clear] makes women..., monks, nuns and all refined people who are not sensitive to true harmony, weep copiously.” Michelangelo’s presumed opinion obviously was meant to demean the heavily ornamented Flemish painting that did move devotees, but as important, it confirms that artists of this age north and south knew procedures through which one manipulated, or avoided, viewers’ specific emotions in contemplating sacred art. It remains for some diligent group of art historians to unearth that lexicon to aid in and deepen our knowledge of religious art. Only then can that old art-historical question be answered of whether the art of the so-called Renaissance was in fact less lacrimose and thus non-miraculous than other styles of representation.

I turn now directly to the question of image ornamentation, a subject I justify not only because of its tremendous, even overriding, importance in the history of reception in this age, but because ornamentation is a topic largely absent from the other papers in this volume, a humbling observation, to be sure, since in the past I have myself often addressed the topic. We begin by

15 Ibid., 113.
16 Comento di Christophoro Landino fiorentino sopra la comedia di Dante Alighieri (Florence, 1481); Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy (Oxford, 1988), 114ff.
17 Francisco de Holanda, De la pintura antigua (Madrid, 1921), 194-197; trans. in Johan Huizinga, The Autumn of the Middle Ages (Chicago, 1996), 320.
18 See eg. Richard C. Trexler, “Dressing and Undressing Images: An Analytic Sketch,” and “The Talking Image: An Attempt at Typology,” and “Gendering Jesus Crucified,” in his Religion in So-
noting that the theme of ornamentation appears at the very inception of the myth of image discovery. Whether found in a stream or buried at the base of a tree, the revived images first complain that they have been neglected and forgotten by time; that is, the traditional devotional ornamentation that once had been paid to them had died out. Then, as a first sign of new devotion, they ask for clothing or its equivalent. One urban Mary asked that she be dusted off (an unwanted ornament!), another might ask for a new veil, or crown or garment, and in general be restored to decency, which might include the demand that a new altar be built at the place she had been found. In short, the whole immediate environment around her body, the statue's ornamental context, was the first order of attention at such findings.

Let us be clear. Behind these demands of ornamentation was the desire for devotion to be rendered, for without devotion, no “miracle” was – is – possible. If their presumed power were to be restored, in short, they had to be dressed up. That is, their naked state had from now on to be covered, so that they could henceforward present a proper face or faces to potential devotees. To cite Juan of Ávila in 1556: “When they want to take out an image to make people weep, they dress it in mourning and decorate it with all manner of things to provoke sorrow.”

The crucial element in this type of story is that devotees intervened either to instigate or to restore what was presumed to be an earlier miraculosity. The same dynamic applied to a figure that was already said to have a miraculous character that now had to be maintained. We best observe this process once the decently accoutered figure resides in a church. In one representative case in Florence, in order to encourage the devotion that was emerging for a particular painted Madonna, she was moved from her cramped quarters to a new altar. The latter was to be surrounded with scepters. Experts in these matters further recommended that her image be “adorned [in the area] above and around [it]. . . with a heaven [cielo] of shields – perhaps a painted vault or baldachin, or a radiant halo around the figure.” Thus parts of the painting were in effect redone or enriched so as to increase its impact upon the viewers. In another case, the Florentine Ricasoli family, observing that “the holy Virgin did not cease to radiate miracles,. . . and wanting the devotion of the people to grow. . . they illustrated this [figure or Virgin] with a
gold crown, and with gold images of angels becomingly holding [scrolls with] the angelic salutation." Can it surprise that these same Ricasoli also "made sure the family's insignias shone on the doors, windows, and vaults of the chapel"? 23 This fundamental dedication to the proposition that almost anything might be done to a figure – excepting the eyes (?) – to distinguish its appearance from other images so as to maintain the presence of devotees at its feet is not archaic. Up to Vatican II and beyond, the coronation of (a figure of) for instance the Queen of Heaven as the patron of some country, diocese or parish was utterly and commonly pompous. Its high point was often the placement of a crown on the head of some charismatic Mary, thus rendering her for devotees more enduringly capable of miracles. 24 Certainly other readers as well have witnessed such popular ecclesiastical coronations. Needless to say, the development of such cult figures over time – in an (just as often failing) attempt to continue the so-called miracles, be it well noted – means that over long periods of time as well, those in charge of particular miraculous images regularly retouched and reshaped, manipulated these images, according to the aesthetic guidelines of the time, in order to reinvigorate these images' alleged power. It might be speculated that that was the fate of many a painting or sculpture of those Renaissance masters who had not thought ornaments were necessary. The pious Philip II, for instance, presumably had something like this in mind when he added a loin cloth to Benvenuto Cellini's marbled Crucified. 25 Obviously, students of such seemingly one-time paintings and sculptures often find that they contain the work of hands from different eras, reworking an original to respond to what moved viewers of succeeding ages; they will find this practice widespread when devotional images are more widely studied. 26 In fact, the reality of European cult images is often comparable to those many Maya Marys who have overtly accumulated many huipiles or dresses, one atop the other. 27 Devotional paintings and sculptures are still dressed and redressed in our modern age. This brings us to the phenomenon of outfitting images with actual dresses and cloaks, that is, with a full set of clothes. It appears, first of all, that some late medieval contemporaries thought that only statues of a certain age should be dressed, a Bamberg document of 1470 saying that previously unexceptional statues became powerful at age sixty and thus ought to be clothed on reaching that age, obviously to actuate their charisma. On the

25 Or for that matter the recent action of the Attorney General of the United States, John Ashcroft, in covering up a naked statue in a government building.
26 In fact, the redoing of processional images in Andalusia in the present day is a matter of journalistic interest, as the author found several years ago in Seville when the journal *ABC* ran an elaborate story on the process.
other hand, some Europeans of a slightly later period linked such dressing to an image’s age more mundanely, opining that people tended to dress old images because the painting or sculpting style reflected on the bare image by then had gone out of fashion. In either case, it does appear that the cultural factor of the age of a statue or painting might at times affect its asserted miraculous character.

As is well known, the corporations of European towns and villages as well as prominent citizens were those who regularly presented particular statues and paintings with articles of dress or the cloth to make them, cloth at times outfitted with the patron’s own familial coats of arms so that the devout, in worshiping such a statue, would also be paying fealty if not veneration to the donors. In fact, such families, gilds, political officials and the like often had contractual obligations to this effect. For needless to say, some of the cloth presented to such images was only fictitiously intended for manufacture into clothing, but was really a payment to the church clergy, who either sold it in the market or, alternately, used it to make clerical garb. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon of cloth bestowed on a statue, actually a recirculation of that cloth from one group of citizens to others, can be viewed as comparable to the circulation of another value, that of charisma, from some citizens to others, a process evident in the common practice of traditional Europeans of wearing clothes that have been temporarily worn by recently deceased holy men and women, that is, new images.

Upon reception of these gifts, the (usually clerical) protectors of the images were required actually to clothe the appropriate image on that supernatural’s feastday. While the process was largely identical across Europe in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, it is in Spain that the documents show this etiquette carried out most punctiliously. Males devoted to one Spanish Virgin, for example, dared not approach the Virgin’s image because of the shame involved in possibly seeing her “undressed.” If priests might after all approach another such image to change her clothes, they had to use poles so they would not shamefully touch that Virgin’s “flesh.” Thus the image (usually) partook of the saint’s own represented gender. More regularly in this culture, we find organized groups of women (camareras) — or gays (maricas) in at least one Andalusian town — charged with removing the old clothing and then outfitting her with her new threads.

Capturing an assertedly miraculous image for a church was not just a way of hopefully projecting her miraculosity into the future through the manipulations of sacerdotal and artistic technocrats, but a means of controlling her miraculosity so that it did not prove destructive of social order. Our image

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22 Trexler, “Dressing and Undressing,” 376, 379.
29 A complex system of exchange was involved: patrons bestowed on their Marys clothes they had already worn, to often don them later once they had been worn by the Virgin; see Trexler, “Ritual Behavior.”
once revested and often recrowned, he or she now faced the devout, whose wonder and miraculous expectation was obviously a function not of the naked statue, which was never seen by the faithful at large, but of the image’s glittery appearance. Indeed, naked charisma might be dangerous. Thus miraculous charisma was in fact the product of working up, by technocrats and/or the devout who controlled the image. The dress, and then the veils, the crowns, the angels, the altar arches and all the rest, produced the tears which were the precondition of claims of miraculosity, and then the general but ordered devotion in church that made it consensually a fact.

By the sixteenth century, prelates regularly protested that they wanted the representation of clothing to be of the same material as the rest of the image. But parish rectors and vicars just as often protested or even ignored such admonitions, because they knew finances and attendance would collapse if the bishops’ ordinances were minded. The circulation of clothing and other values among churchgoers, though described as gifts to supernaturals, was in fact a foundation of civil order, contract and amity. Thus the parish priests and the devotees won out in the end, and cloth remained the essence of the sacred interchange and a dominant feature of images in the Catholic world. Often the only parts of the body of a so-called miraculous image that were visible to the faithful were its face and hands, a process hastened by the fact that anyway, they were often the only parts actually executed by master artists across Europe.  

But why had the urge to dress statues developed in the first place? The answer to this question needs first to be contextualized in art historical terms: We are faced with a broad historical process by which single-material images came often to be converted into cloth covered images whose underlying substance proved finally to be less than met the eye. That process or ideal type has been well studied by Manuel Trens in his work on the fate of Iberian wood sculptures of Mary. These often charismatic images were originally less than life size, but carved so that the wood figured the “clothing” of the supernatural. In the late Middle Ages a new aesthetic emerged, certainly driven by the new (in good measure textile) bourgeoisie of the Mediterranean and Flemish cities and courts. The hoary old figures, treasured because of their age, were reworked into life-sized figures that were dressed in the threads of their patrons and then made capable of moving. Commonly, the head (with eyes) and perhaps parts of the upper torso of the old figure would be severed from the rest of the figure, which was buried or otherwise discarded. This finished head was then attached to a much longer, usually unfinished block of wood which might reach clear to the ground or down to a point where it was at-

31 A situation also encountered in the great wax votive figures of Italy, on which see the index entry in Trexler, Public Life.
32 Manuel Trens, María. Iconografía de la Virgen en el arte español (Madrid, 1947), especially 640-649, and the same author’s Les Majestats Catalanes (Barcelona, 1966). See also Webster, Art and Ritual, 80.